

The
**MOTION-PICTURE
COMRADES'
IN AFRICAN JUNGLES**



ELMER TRACEY BARNES

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CHS-(22) F 72

To Fannie
June 1924





"There he starts on his drive," said Oscar.

THE MOTION PICTURE COMRADES IN AFRICAN JUNGLES

OR

CAMERA BOYS IN WILD ANIMAL LAND

BY

ELMER TRACEY BARNES



6

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THE MOTION PICTURE COMRADES IN AFRICAN JUNGLES

CHAPTER I

THE WONDERFUL PLAN

"You look as if you were almost bursting with some great news, Oscar!"

"Perhaps I am, Jack. In fact, I own up that I can hardly keep from letting letting out a wild whoop right now, I'm so excited."

"I reckon you must have got a letter when you dropped in at the post office just before I came along. Anyway, I saw you stick something into your pocket in a hurry as though you had a secret. Was your news in that letter, Oscar?"

"It surely was, old chum."

"And are you going to tell me about it; or is this a personal matter, Oscar?"

"Well, I should say 'yes' to the first part of that double question; and about the last I own that it concerns two other fellows besides myself. They are Jack Anderson and Ballyhoo Jones."

"Look here, Oscar, was that letter from the

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people who paid us such a royal good price for that series of circus motion picture films we took of Major Barley's World Famous Shows?"

The other boy laughed—such a pleasant laugh it was, too, that seemed to draw one toward him just as the magnetic North Pole does the needle in the mariner's compass.

"You're a wonder when it comes to finding the answer to mysteries, Jack," he presently remarked. "If you hadn't already made up your mind to be an artist, and an expert motion picture photographer like your father was before you, I really believe you could earn your salt as a detective."

"Oh! let up with your taffy, please, Oscar, and answer my question. Where do I come in along this deal?"

"Just as soon as Ballyhoo Jones gets here I'll tell you, and if you take a look down the street you'll see him sauntering along in this direction right now."

"He's as slow as molasses in winter," urged the impatient Jack, "except when he gets fully stirred up, and then, why it's more like chain lightning I'd compare him to. Ballyhoo is a queer chap."

"But we both love him just the same, for a better chum never walked the earth," Oscar continued. "He doesn't know what thrilling news is waiting for him here. If he had any suspicion you'd see him take jumps like a kangaroo ten feet long."

"For goodness' sake, then, let's step out and

meet him halfway, Oscar," urged the anxious one. "Anything to shorten the time, for I'm burning up to hear your big news."

While the pair are walking down toward the third lad it might be just as well for us to say a few words regarding their identity, as well as mentioning certain events that had come to pass recently to stir the current in their young lives.

They all lived in a town named Melancton. Oscar Farrar was an orphan, with an indulgent guardian, an elderly physician named Dr. Felix Clements. As it happened that Oscar had been left quite a little fortune, he was in a position to finance any boyish scheme that his indulgent guardian, who never forgot that he was once a lad himself, chose to commend.

His companion, Jack Anderson, early in life gave evidence of being a worthy successor to his father, who had made quite a name for himself, first as a flashlight photographer of wild game in its natural haunts; and later as a daring traveler whose great ambition was to secure motion pictures of big game in Africa and South America, as well as famous scenes in countries inaccessible to the ordinary tourist, like Thibet, and the wilds of Central China.

Jack's father never came back from one of these venturesome expeditions, and had long since been given up as dead. The family had enough to live comfortably on; but some of Jack's dreams would have had to go a long time without realization only for his chum's generosity.

The third member of the "firm," as Ballyhoo Jones was fond of calling the combination, was a character, indeed. His real name was Jonathan Edwards Jones, and his one great hobby was mimicing animals and birds, and, indeed, any living thing. Why, many a time the boy had entertained a group of his admiring friends with a mock circus, all the way from the cries of the side-show "barkers"; the various barks, snorts, roars and shrieks of the menagerie animals in their cages; the puns of the clowns, and the grandiloquent language of the ring-master introducing the lady rider, or the world-famous lion-tamer.

It was of course a foregone conclusion that the Jones boy should become identified in some way with this wonderful gift of mimicry, and so his friends had early fallen into the habit of calling him "Ballyhoo." This was simply because he imitated the calls of the ballyhoo barkers trying to attract crowds to view the freaks contained in their side-show tents.

Some time before, while summer was still on the land, the boys had conceived the novel scheme of visiting a big traveling circus, and securing motion pictures of the leading acts, as well as some things the public seldom, if ever, see. These latter consisted of the taking down and putting up of the "Big Round-top," the loading of the cages belonging to the menagerie on the railway flat cars; the feeding of the big company, and stirring events connected with life behind the scenes.

What they accomplished along these lines has

already been set down in the first volume of this series of motion picture stories. If any reader of this book has failed to secure the earlier volume, they have missed some lively adventures, as well as a most entertaining description of circus life.*

Having had wonderful success with his series of films, Jack was encouraged to look forward to another trial. Oscar had purchased a complete outfit, spending many hundreds of dollars for the camera and supplies. They had received five times as much money from the head of a film combination controlling the output of several large corporations, and having extensive studios and companies of actors in California, as well as other places.

These pictures were now being shown all over the country, though they had not yet reached the local theatre in Melancton. Everywhere Oscar heard they were being received with great joy, and had been pronounced one of the hits of the year.

This was the situation at the time the two lads came together in the post office. As Ballyhoo Jones had now become aware of their presence, and hurried his steps on seeing the impatient Jack wildly beckon, it is about time that we take up the story again at that point.

“What’s in the wind, fellows?” asked the Jones boy, a quizzical look on his rather freckled face.

“Oscar has just received a letter from those

* “The Motion Picture Boys’ Great Venture.”

people who bought our films," explained Jack, "and wouldn't breathe a word of what it contained until you came up."

"Whew! that sounds pretty good to me," remarked Ballyhoo Jones, grinning as he fixed his eyes on the party mentioned. "So get busy, Oscar, please, and give us a look-in, won't you? I wonder now if you wrote to them about a certain big scheme we three have been considering?"

"Just what I did, Ballyhoo," admitted Oscar. "And you'll both be delighted to know that they've tumbled to the idea like hot cakes."

"Hurrah! Speed up, Oscar, and give us the particulars!" exclaimed Jack, his face beaming with a happy smile, for this meant new business in a field he had always yearned to occupy.

"They make us a splendid offer," the other continued, "to go out to the wilds of Africa, around the region traversed by the Roosevelt expedition in part, and secure a pack of Nature motion pictures of big game in its native haunts. Of course, there have been a number of such reels shown throughout this country, some of them cleverly taken, too; but our success with the circus pictures makes these people believe we can outdo them all by a whole lot."

"That makes me feel great!" said Jack, actually blushing, and with reason, for, being the only expert photographer of the party, the main part of the work had fallen on his shoulders, and surely the credit of their success should also be his.

"They agree to stand for our expenses up to

a figure that I feel sure will cover every amount we need pay out," Oscar went on to say, deliberately; "and only ask the privilege of buying our entire take. If we make a fizzle, why they're out that much, you see. The price offered is even better than the one they made us for the circus films."

"Let's shake hands all around on this glorious news, fellows!" remarked Ballyhoo Jones. "And I expect both of you to help me get the consent of my folks to going along with you on this new expedition. I've been thinking up a plan that might do the business. And it'd nearly kill me if I was kept home when you're going to have such a dandy time."

The wonderful letter was thereupon produced, and carefully gone over. Each of the three boys made suggestions, but really the offer was so broad and generous that not the least objection could be found to accepting it as a whole.

"Come around to my house tonight, both of you," said Oscar, as they found that the sun was going down, and evening would soon be upon them. "We'll go over it all again, and if we decide to accept this offer of the Company we can fix up an agreement to be sent by wire as a night letter."

"And I'll let you into my scheme for winning my folks' consent to my joining forces with the balance of the firm in a trip to South Africa," said Ballyhoo, looking a little anxious, for he did not feel any too confident.

Hardly had Oscar finished his supper, after telling Dr. Clements and his good wife all about the new field that had opened for the display of their talents as motion picture artists, than Ballyhoo Jones showed up. Jack was not three minutes behind him, being just as eager to talk over the great prospect which had so suddenly loomed up on their near horizon.

They spent a lively evening of it in the library. Oscar showed them maps and charts of the country they proposed visiting, as well as many vivid descriptions of the natives both animal and human, which he had been collecting for some time. These were of especial interest to Jack, since it was to this region that his lamented father had last journeyed, never to return again; and ever since his one dream had been to himself look upon the scenes that had been so fascinating to his dead parent.

They went about the task of figuring everything out that could be thought of, in a very business-like fashion. Ballyhoo was looking hopeful, too; something that had been said by his father that night at the supper table seemed to encourage him in the belief that if Jack and Oscar, as well as Dr. Clements, laid siege to his folks they must capitulate, and give their consent to his going along.

"And," Oscar went on to say when things had been arranged so far as writing the message of acceptance went, "none of us must imagine for a minute that we're going to have a picnic on this trip. We'll suffer all sorts of things,—bites from

insects, danger of the sleeping sickness, perils from wild beasts, thirst, and perhaps hunger as well; storms and deserts will be our portion, and then there's the chance of being killed by hostile blacks. But if we can win out, and fetch home the kind of motion pictures we aim to get, it'll pay us over and over again for all we endure."

Both of the others declared that no matter what Oscar said about the dangers by which they would be constantly surrounded, they could not be held back. Jack in particular had a strange light in his eye as he went on to say calmly:

"I've been dreaming of this chance to visit the jungles of Africa for many moons, fellows. Both of you know why. And now that the opportunity has come I tell you wild horses couldn't keep me from going."

"Me too," piped up Ballyhoo Jones, "and I only hope my maw doesn't talk paw into putting his foot down hard, and squelching all my hopes."

So all of them in a bunch went down to the station, where the night letter was dispatched to the head of the colossal motion picture concern, accepting the offer that had been received in their communication of recent date, and promising to visit headquarters in New York City on the following day, when a contract could be signed that would complete the deal.

After that the trio of chums went to their several homes, to dream of the glorious prospect that awaited them in the near future.

CHAPTER II

TAKING THE PLUNGE

SOME six weeks after the eventful day on which Oscar Farrar received that wonderful offer from the combination of motion picture companies, a steamship was putting into a port of call on the east coast of Africa.

On the deck, and eagerly scanning the strange coast, were our trio of venturesome young friends. The presence of Ballyhoo Jones was evidence of the potentiality of Dr. Clements' arguments upon the boy's parents; though at one time the chances of his being able to accompany his chums had seemed most gloomy.

But here they were nearing the end of their long sea journey, and with all their numerous pieces of luggage on deck ready to be taken

They had enjoyed the voyage greatly, after getting their sea legs, for Ballyhoo had been very sick for several days. No storm of any degree of violence had crossed the ocean path of the vessel since they left London aboard the same; and now they could say that so far all seemed well.

They had made many good friends aboard the

steamship, from officers down to some of the crew, as well as the few fellow passengers. With the great war on in Europe, travelers were few and far between, and vessels engaged in ordinary commerce found the greatest cargoes and at unheard of prices in all the experience of sea-going mariners.

Of course, as they took the long way around, circling the Cape of Good Hope, rather than risk submarines and torpedoes and floating mines in the Mediterranean, the voyage had not been so interesting as if they had passed through the Suez Canal and navigated the historical Red Sea.

When finally the vessel came to an anchor, and a lighter arrived to take such passengers ashore with their luggage as desired to leave the steamship at this forlorn port of call, the boys said good-bye to their new friends, and went aboard the tossing lighter. They were the only ones to go ashore.

Their intention in visiting Central 'Africa was well known to the people whom they had been traveling with for some weeks, and naturally they were followed by the best wishes of all for the success of their hazardous enterprise. That a trio of American boys not yet arrived at young manhood should have the nerve to attempt such a dangerous mission had been a continual source of wonder and admiration to captain and crew.

Once ashore and they saw to having the precious cameras and the many bundles of additional luggage properly taken care of. There was

a likelihood of thieves being abroad, and the boys believed they would do well to guard against anything happening to damage their outfit so early in the game.

They had brought along an extra camera to make sure of not being left in the lurch should anything happen to the other machine. Besides, Jack was an exceedingly clever hand at making all manner of repairs, since he had taken up photographic work as a hobby years before, under his father's tutelage.

Of course, the boys were first of all deeply impressed with the African scenery, for none of them had ever looked upon the like before. They were full of business, however, and could not let anything like pleasure interfere with the great work in hand.

They had taken copious notes from accounts of other adventurers' experience in this section of country, from hunters of big game, explorers of the wilds where pigmy tribes were to be run across, ivory hunters, and even the famous Roosevelt expedition, that would always be a landmark when such things were mentioned.

First of all, they found quarters in a sort of hotel or tavern run by a Portuguese named Antonio De Gama. The man could speak English, and, upon learning what these three boys intended to attempt, he seemed greatly amused, as though he thought they must have run away from home, since only foolish parents could allow their children to embark on such a hazardous journey.

Still, Antonio allowed that for a consideration he stood ready to assist Oscar and his two chums to the best of his ability. He soon discovered that they were fairly well posted with regard to what they would require on their long trip into the interior.

That afternoon, while the boys were resting, for the sun seemed frightfully hot once the sea breeze died out, they were approached by a quaint figure of a man who limped as though he had had a broken leg.

They could see that he was a white, though, and when they discovered that he had a broad smile on his face, and upon speaking disclosed the brogue of an Irishman, somehow Oscar felt that they had run across a treasure.

It turned out just that way, and they were relieved from depending on the Portuguese hotel-keeper for advice. Phelim O'Rourke was his name, he announced, after being asked to sit down and join them in a drink of cool limeade. He candidly admitted that all his life he had been a rolling stone, traveling over the whole known world in his search for adventure, and to see strange sights.

Phelim interested the boys greatly. They never tired of hearing his amazing tales of wild perils that had been his portion, some of which may have been slightly enlarged by constant repetition, but which could not be doubted, for he showed a wonderful knowledge of the countries he mentioned.

These covered a wide range of territory—South

American revolutionary republics, Australian wastes, Abyssinia, the Cameroons district, Somaliland, Mexico in the throes of internal strife, the pearl fisheries of Ceylon, Arctic explorations, and, in fact, about every place under the sun where an ardent and fearless Celt was likely to wander following the beckoning star of hope and fortune.

What interested Oscar and Jack most of all was his declaration that he had been connected with a company of Americans who pierced this self-same African wilderness with the intention of taking motion pictures of the big game so long hunted by wealthy sportsmen.

It was while serving them, Phelim declared, that he had come nearer to being killed than ever before in all his life. An enraged rhinoceros had charged the camp without any provocation, save that it apparently took offense because of the burning fire, and had both trampled on Phelim and gored him with its horn.

He had come near dying, and ever since was lamed so badly that he could no longer walk any distance as in the past. His adventure days seemed to be over at last, though he acknowledged that the gentlemen of the party had left him a goodly sum of money as a recompense, and a promise that if he ever chose to go to America again he could secure an easy job with one of the party who had fancied him.

What pleased Oscar most of all was the fact that here they had a chance to secure all the necessary information with regard to hiring black por-

ters to stick with them until they came back again to the coast.

"Sure I c'n pick yees up thirty, forty or fifty good blacks for yees safari," the accommodating Irishman told them, after he had been appealed to on this score. "'Tis dapely interested I have become in yees bowld lads, and I'll take the greatest deloight in hilpin' ye. I'm in touch wid the headmen among siveral tribes av blacks. I'll hire yees the bist av min from the Wakumbas, the Kavirondos, the Monumwezis and some more tribes that live beyant the big forest."

This was just what had been bothering the boys most of all. They knew how much of the success of their expedition must depend on their securing faithful porters who would stick to them through thick and thin. Every bit of the mass of luggage, stores, camera supplies, clothes, sleeping articles and such must be carried on the heads or backs of stout or wiry blacks, through dense jungles, across wide and swift streams, over kopjes, and through deep and dangerous valleys, where all manner of difficulties lay in wait for the adventurous traveler and hunter.

On the second day they began to get things started. By this time they came to know Phelim better, and their liking for the genial Irishman continued to grow the more they saw of him. Really, Oscar declared it was one of the happiest accidents in all their experience that they had run across this remarkable man.

If only he had been himself nothing would have

pleased them more than to coax him to become a member of the expedition. Indeed, many times did Phelim himself bemoan the fact that his wandering days were over.

"I'd be tickled to death at the chance av going along wid yees me foine lads," he said again and again, with a deep sigh, "but I niver could kape up wid the procession. A man has till have a sound pair av liggs to go into thim African jungles an' forests. I'd be afther fallin' down before yees was will stharterd, an' have to turn back. 'Tis broken-hearted I am the day becase av this."

The days passed on and the great work made constant progress. Phelim entered into it with the enthusiasm of one whose whole heart was bound up in such labors. If he could not enjoy the pleasure of being a member of the party, it was evident that the Irishman was determined the boys should not suffer through any lack of attention on his part.

He again and again gave them good advice with regard to what they should do in order to avoid some of the many pitfalls that he knew would be awaiting them, once they reached the land where the big game roamed. Jack and Oscar were never tired of listening and asking questions. Ballyhoo too, with his interest in animated nature, could sit for hours at the feet of this remarkable man who had seen it all, and had an inexhaustible fund of thrilling yarns to relate.

The blacks were hired in the customary way, and a strapping bunch they made as they gath-

ered around their camp fires previous to the setting out of the expedition.

Oscar and Jack had learned how to talk with the headman of the safari, with whom most of their business would be carried on. Several of the porters had a slight smattering of English, from having served under Roosevelt, and other men who in days past had come to this region and entered the heart of the Dark Continent on various pretexts.

It amused Ballyhoo Jones to try and interview these fellows, who had a select repertoire of possibly seven or eight words, the meaning of which they knew. These consisted for the most part of such words as "bully!" "sleep," "march," "money," "good," "yep, Bwana," and of course the all-important one of "grub."

As a rule they were happy-go-lucky fellows, with their shining black skins, eyes that danced with the easily satisfied souls of boys, and chattering ways when seated or squatted around the fire, cooking their meat in a primitive fashion.

Yes, Ballyhoo promised himself a whole lot of fun with these porters in the days and nights to come. To him the trip was a gigantic picnic, for Ballyhoo could not anticipate the dangers that would soon surround them, as both Jack and Oscar were able to do, being of a more serious nature than the Jones boy.

It was no light task that they struggled with when arranging all these various details, while getting ready to start forth. Success or failure

must be their portion, and, if it turned out to be the latter, the chances were none of them would ever come back to tell the tragic tale. From all they had heard and read, those dark forests of Africa, with their pestilential stagnant swamps, and poisonous insects and snakes, had been the burial place of a myriad of venturesome whites who had no doubt started forth just as gaily as they expected to.

Despite all this, none of the three ever showed any sign of the white feather. It seemed as though they had good blood in their veins, which had come down from the old Revolutionary ancestors who braved death at Lexington, Bunker Hill, and many other places of historical interest where freedom was won for the young republic.

Finally, everything that could be brought to their attention by Phelim O'Rourke had been accomplished. The safari was ready to make a start on the following morning, and the veteran assured them they would have fair weather, at least for the beginning of their journey.

It was a brave sight when, with the breaking of camp on that next morning, they shook hands with the sighing Irishman and started forth to do and to dare. The long train of porters, each with a load on his head or back, chattered like so many black crows or magpies as they too bade their fellows farewell, not knowing whether they would ever meet again, but merry through it all.

The west lay beyond them, weird, mysterious and filled with possibilities for the strangest

sights human eyes had ever looked upon. Day after day the boys had watched the glowing sun sink to rest, knowing that over there *somewhere* they were going to meet with remarkable experiences that would thrill them to the core. They also had reason to hope that they were fated to run across many wonderful chances for securing some of the unusual kind of pictures of which they were in search.

Now the final word was given. The safari was in motion, twisting along its path like a great sinuous serpent, the sun's rays glistening on the bare legs and in some cases backs of the porters.

One by one they plunged into the forest. The receding line grew shorter and shorter, for at the front was the experienced headman to whom the blacks all looked as their leader and advisor while away from their village homes.

As the last man vanished Oscar and his two chums turned to wave one more farewell to Phe-lim O'Rourke. Then they too pushed ahead, and presently found themselves surrounded by a great forest of almost tropical growth.

They were in Africa at last. The dream which Jack had been hugging to his boyish heart had come true, and from that hour on a constant succession of thrilling events was apt to be their daily portion, running the whole gamut of perils such as may beset the daring soul who is capable of taking his courage in both hands and braving the unknown vicissitudes awaiting him in such a country as Darkest Africa.

CHAPTER III

DEEP IN THE AFRICAN WILDS

“WELL, here we are at last, on the borders of the greatest hunting grounds left in the known world, almost untouched up to the present.”

It was Ballyhoo Jones who made this remark, as he and his two mates limped along in the wake of the safari. The blacks no longer sang or shouted as they walked. All that sort of thing had been abandoned days and days before, for they had now been as much as three full weeks on the way.

What they had seen and endured during this time would fill a book. At first the boys had suffered terribly, not being accustomed to such daily privations as they now had to endure. The heat, and the insects, too, had made them miserable; but as the time slipped on, somehow they seemed to become more hardened to the daily grind, so by now they began to consider themselves in the light of seasoned veterans.

The headman had been following a trail all of this time. He understood just what his employers wanted to accomplish, and was taking them

to where they would find the greatest collection of wild beasts ever seen together since Livingstone first started on his exploring trips to the inner heart of the Dark Continent.

Once they had met a party of ivory hunters on their way out, and because several of them were whites the boys had made much of the encounter. They even camped together over night, and in the exchange of views the hunters learned of great events that had happened in the warring world since they left civilization's outposts many months before.

On their part they were able to give Oscar and his friends considerable valuable information concerning the lay of the land to which they were heading, as well as to warn them against trusting some of the savage tribes of blacks they might run across in that same region.

Another strange experience the boys had later on. This was when they also met an expedition that had spent some months in the jungle, trapping wild beasts for the American market. They learned that there is always a good market among menageries, zoölogical gardens, and public parks for specimens of lions, tigers, zebras, giraffes and similar beasts.

It was a most wonderful sight, that procession of rough wheeled cages on the way to the coast, each one occupied by some fierce beast that had fallen into the pits dug by these experienced trappers, and would doubtless spend the remainder of its life being gaped at by countless men, women

and children, to whom it would seem an object of curiosity.

Ballyhoo Jones was greatly pleased with this meeting in the great forest. He had always taken such a deep interest in everything connected with shows and menageries that it seemed as though fortune had marked him for a favorite in thus giving him a golden opportunity to learn at first hand how all these animals were caught, and then brought out of the forest, to commence their long sea journey to the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

There were times when Jack seemed a trifle gloomy, but Oscar knew the reason for this. He understood that when his chum gazed around him at these remarkable sights he must be thinking how his poor father's eyes beheld perhaps the identical same scenes on that fatal journey from which he had never returned.

He also knew that Jack had, when alone with Phelim O'Rourke, "pumped" that individual in the hope of learning something connected with his father. He had not met with any great success. The Irishman told him he had heard mention of a single party who some years before had headed an expedition into the wilderness with the avowed intention of taking wild animal motion pictures. He was said to be the pioneer along that line, the very first who had come to Africa with an outfit built for that interesting work.

But so far as Phelim could find out, he had never returned, and his fate was, like that of

some other daring souls, shrouded in mystery. Those mute African forests and jungles held many a dark secret that would perhaps never be made known. Even the man's name had never been mentioned in Phelim's company. So Jack had succeeded in picking up very little information there.

They had been pretty fortunate so far. As yet their little caravan numbered within a single member of the number with which they had started. One man had been taken sick, and although helped wonderfully by the magic medicine which Oscar, the ward of a doctor, had given him, must needs be sent back, as he would have been a drag on the progress of the whole party, being unable to do his share in carrying the burdens.

"I expect, though," Oscar was saying when Ballyhoo Jones made the remark with which this chapter commences, "that our troubles are just going to begin now."

"Why do you say that?" demanded the Jones boy, uneasily.

"Because we've left the beaten track, for one thing," Oscar told him, "and swung into a region that has no well traveled trail."

"What are we following, then, may I ask?" continued Ballyhoo, who once he started asking questions could not be headed off until his curiosity was satisfied.

"In this region," explained Oscar, "as our headman tried to tell me, there are numerous paths beaten out by animals. These nearly al-

ways run east and west. They bring up at some feeding place, or it may be a favorite water hole, where they come to drink. We are following one of those animal trails right now. That's why we wind in and out so, in a dizzy zigzag way."

"There are other reasons, too, judging from what you said," continued the persistent Ballyhoo.

"Sure thing," replied the other cheerfully, "lots of them, Ballyhoo. You see, we are now in the country of the sleeping sickness, for one thing. Then, again, we stand a good chance of running up against some hostile tribe of blacks who might think it worth while to try and wipe us out, so as to secure plenty of booty. How would you like to find yourself made a slave by an ugly negro king, and forced to work for him the rest of your life?"

"Oh! that doesn't scare me one whit, Oscar," chuckled Ballyhoo. "I've got a raft of tricks that I could play, calculated to make these ignorant blacks look on me as a white god. Once they heard me mimic every kind of beast and bird, or throw my voice like I've learned to do after studying ventriloquism so long, I reckon I'd have the whole bunch eating out of my hand, and placing my royal foot on their woolly heads in token of submission."

Both the other boys laughed heartily at the picture thus artfully drawn, and Jack took up the subject by adding as his contribution:

"Yes, and if only our cameras and films came

through safely, think how we could develop the last, and have all sorts of fun frightening the natives with living pictures shown on a white wall. They'd think we had a ghostly army that we could summon at will."

Indeed, it would seem that even after experiencing more or less hardships on the journey none of the boys felt such a thing as alarm. It was well that they were gifted with such indomitable spirits, for they would probably have need of all the courage they possessed before they found their way out of Jungleland again.

Already Jack had managed to secure a number of interesting pictures. These for the most part consisted of the trailing safari, with its queer characteristics, there being representatives of seven separate tribes in the moving line. Then he had views of the returning ivory hunters, showing their spoils, as well as the skins of many great beasts they had shot. Besides this the series that covered the menagerie of captured animals, in their rude cages, would certainly elicit more or less enthusiasm when shown on the screen in a myriad of American theatres.

In order to be ready to get any picture that might come up during the day, Jack always had his camera handy. Sometimes he carried it over his own shoulder, and his coat was beginning to show signs of wear from contact with the tripod. Again, he would have a certain picked black, a husky favorite of the boys, who went by the name of Bingo, as that was the nearest they could come

to pronouncing it, walk alongside, with the precious box in charge.

These black porters and gun bearers one and all looked upon the polished cameras as boxes containing "magic." They fully believed each held a powerful spirit or genii who could at pleasure come forth and do amazing things. When Jack ground away with the crank they thought he was interviewing the great unseen god, and begging him to watch over the expedition so that no evil befell it.

The boys, being warned by Phelim, did not attempt to undecieve their superstitious followers. Such a belief was apt to work to their advantage in the long run. If they could impress it upon the minds of these ignorant people that they were possessed of unnatural powers, it was likely they would get all the more faithful service.

So every act in connection with those two wonderful boxes was carried on with the greatest of awe. Once the cameras had been safely deposited in camp, not for all the money in the universe could any black be tempted to touch one of them, after Bwana Os had put the "spell" on the boxes.

That word "Bwana," which really means "Master," was applied to the three chums in a fashion that often caused laughter on their part. Oscar was "Os," Jack actually had his full name given to him; while the last member of the firm answered to the cognomen of "Bwana Hoo-hoo."

The day was getting old while they thus walked

through the forest in a long sinuous line, and the three chums exchanged remarks as has been recorded. Oscar anticipated that shortly the headman would be giving the usual signal telling the tired blacks the day's work was done, and that they could go into camp.

That was always a joyous communication that caused them to burst out into laughter, and a chatter of many tongues. Indeed, to tramp steadily along for many hours, bearing a burden more or less heavy, and with that terrible African sun beating down on their heads whenever they left the shade of the forest and struck across the open veldt was enough to make any one feel rejoiced when it came to an end for that day.

Oscar had fallen back a trifle; Jack, carrying his pet camera on his shoulder, was frowning as though his thoughts might be going back to certain unpleasant things connected with the past; and Ballyhoo Jones, striding along in the van, was wiping his face with a big red bandanna handkerchief, when suddenly a shriek was heard.

All of them became alert, and their eyes instantly sought the line of moving men ahead. It was seen to be wavering, then break, and the blacks ran this way and that as though suddenly seized with a dreadful panic.

"Bwana!" some of them shrieked, doubtless inspired by fear to call upon the white masters to speed to the front with those long shooting sticks that could spit out fire, and speak like the voice of the god of the storm.

CHAPTER IV

A TRAGEDY OF THE VELDT

It was indeed a thrilling scene that the three chums stared at. No need to ask where the centre of interest lay, for the blacks were running from it even as the spokes of a wheel radiate from the hub.

"Something has happened to one of our men!" cried Ballyhoo. "Oh! see, it must be a boa constrictor, hanging down from that limb twenty feet and more up the tree! Oscar, we ought to try and save the poor fellow, because we've got our guns handy!"

"Come on with me, then!" roared Oscar, and, not looking to see whether both of his comrades followed at his heel or not, he started on the run.

As he went he was shouting at the top of his voice, trying to tell the headman, who could understand English fairly well, that this would not do, but some of the porters, throwing their loads to the ground, must rally and attack the terrible serpent with their keen-edged *pangas*; even as the white masters began to speak with the thunder sticks they carried.

Ballyhoo Jones indeed did chase after the

leader, bold as a lion, but not so Jack. He had a most terrible temptation sweep over him. There would be enough to assail the swinging monster serpent when his chums and some of the porters got busy; as for him, was it not his bounden duty to secure a living moving picture of that dramatic episode? Think how many millions of eager spectators that scene would thrill when later on it was thrown upon the screen!

So the artist won out. Jack had his always-ready camera down and focussed almost as soon as he determined upon his course. He commenced grinding away for dear life, bent upon catching the full spirit of the thrilling spectacle that was being enacted there in the African forest, likely to be looked upon as a page from Nature, and showing just what sort of hideous perils always lurk there among the hanging lianas and the tropical growths.

The man was being severely squeezed by the time the boys arrived close up.

Oscar saw that it was going to be a difficult because of its motion, and the fact that there would be constant danger of killing the poor black instead.

Still, he meant to risk a shot or two.

"Let me try it, Ballyhoo!" he snapped to his comrade; and the other seemed perfectly willing, knowing that Oscar could be more depended on to hit the moving target than he believed was possible for him.

The headman and several others of the porters

had taken on fresh courage by this time. No doubt they were more or less inspired by the fact that the white bwanas had rushed fearlessly to the attack. All of them were swinging their blades with which they were in the habit of cutting through tangles of vines and other impediments frequently met with in the forests.

There was quick-witted Jack working away frantically at the crank of his speedily adjusted camera, and taking in every particular of that exciting scene. If only there proved to be sufficient light to give him the sharp contrasts he wanted, Jack well knew he would be getting a perfect gem. Millions of thrilled spectators would hold their very breath with awe when from comfortable seats in the darkened movie theatres they gazed upon the picture true to life taken there thousands of miles away.

Meanwhile Oscar had hastened up as close as he dared. Time was worth considerable, for at any second now those folds of the great serpent might constrict with such terrible force as to crack the ribs of the black.

Bingo, the gun-bearer, who was the favorite of the boys, showed his zeal. He was rushing straight up to the spot, his *panga* glittering in the sunlight as he swung it above his head with determination.

Then, too, Marjuba, the headman was also coming along, with several others at his heels. Oscar saw that if he meant to fire he must do so instantly or they would possibly get in his way.

He had all the instincts of a true hunter, and had practiced at swinging targets many a time. Besides, any one who can gauge the mile-a-minute flight of a wild duck, and bring such a traveler down with a well calculated shot ought to be able, so Oscar figured, to strike that massive moving head.

So he pressed the trigger. He knew he had made a centre shot even as the report of his rifle rang out. Nevertheless, like a true hunter, Oscar instantly sent the empty cartridge case flying, and sped a fresh charge into the chamber from the magazine.

But now the gun-bearer had arrived on the spot. He knew where to deliver a blow in order to accomplish the best results. The watching boys saw that keen-edged blade take a flashing course through space. Then it struck home. Twice more was it swung and a sturdy blow delivered. Why, it was very much on the order of a woodchopper plying his ax, and delivering his strokes in the same place.

Then the tremendously thick body of the writhing serpent was cut in two. Part of the boa fell to the earth, with the unfortunate black still entwined.

There being no longer any danger to be apprehended, the headman and Bingo quickly released the victim from the severed folds of the slain serpent.

It was at first feared that the porter must be dead, for his body had been subjected to an enor-

mous pressure. Oscar, being gifted with a fair amount of medical knowledge, due to his being a ward of a practicing physician, started to ascertain the extent of the damages. If the man were still alive, they must take care of him, even though a litter were necessary to carry him along. On the other hand, should he be beyond hope, a lonely grave in the heart of the African forest would be his portion.

Fortunately for all concerned, it was found that he had escaped the worst. The boa constrictor had not been given time to do its worst before being attacked. And the man would recover, though he must feel the effect of his "squeeze" for some time.

As Oscar well knew the immense serpents that sometimes run to a length of forty feet, and depend upon constricting their folds in order to slay; all of the same species having various names in different countries. What is a boa in Africa may be a python, an anaconda, or some other snake in South America, the Philippines or Siam.

The march was resumed. Several porters had been left with the injured man, and in due time they would follow the main body. An hour later, and with the sun full in the West, the expedition came suddenly to the edge of a swell veldt.

The blacks had ceased chattering, and all was silent. Oscar knew what this meant. There would very likely be wild beasts found feeding on the open, as had occurred on numerous previous oc-

casions; and the natives were depending on him to creep up with that magic stick he carried, to compel one of these to dutifully roll over at the sound of a voice from the unseen god that tarried within the tube. In other words, they yearned for fresh meat for their evening meal.

Nothing loth, Oscar proceeded to stalk a bunch of hartebeestes that were feeding within gunshot, and somehow had not as yet taken the alarm. The wind must have been from the West, for otherwise these animals would have long ago scented the presence of human enemies, and taken a hasty departure for parts unknown.

Oscar was well drilled in this work. He found little trouble in creeping up to within easy shot of the small herd. Many eager eyes were doubtless watching from the screen of the bushes along the edge of the deep forest.

When he felt satisfied that he was within two hundred yards of his intended prey, the boy sat down, rested his elbow on his leg, and taking careful aim let drive.

Almost with the sharp report of the repeating rifle he heard the dull impact of the soft-nosed bullet striking the side of the beast, and flattening like a mushroom.

Of course, the balance of the herd was off like a flash. Oscar's victim also commenced to run, but in a groggy fashion. The young hunter could have easily pumped another bullet into the beast, but he knew there was no need. Besides, when once far removed from a source of supply, the cau-

tious sportsman will always endeavor to conserve his ammunition, since there is no need of using two shots when one will do the business.

His faith was justified too, for the hartebeeste soon came to a stand, and rolled over. Then there was a chorus of wild shouts from the waiting blacks, a dozen of whom came scampering forth from the shelter in which they had been concealed.

Knives were quickly busy, and in an incredibly short time every atom of meat had been secured. Even before this was accomplished shadows began to flit atwart the veldt. The carrion birds were gathering to the feast, attracted by the scent of blood, which they seem to catch at an amazing distance.

Across the small veldt the caravan went. Looking back, Oscar could see skulking figures among the flapping buzzards. These he knew to be either the striped hyenas or else the smaller even more cowardly jackals, though it was mystifying where they had sprung from so quickly.

Besides the hartebeestes, before the sound of the rifle frightened them away, the boys had seen upon the open stretch groups of other interesting wild creatures. A bunch of timid graceful little gazelles attracted their attention, and beyond were a number of ostriches, though these vanished like smoke when the alarm broke forth.

Further still they could see the beautifully striped sides of zebras, while some lordly elands, as well as black, shaggy looking wildebeestes had been in view.

Apparently, just as the head man had promised them, they were now come within the borders of the big game country. From now on they might expect to meet with a wonderful variety of animals ranging from elephants and lions down to the sing-sing buck.

So they crossed the veldt and again plunged into the depths of the gloomy African forest and jungle. The boys discovered that as they advanced the solitude was becoming more and more pronounced, so that they could well believe they were now in the heart of wild animal land.

The sun was nearly down. It would drop like a plummet, apparently, when it went, with night speedily following. There was little of twilight here, such as those living in Northern countries are accustomed to. When the sun set in a blaze of glory the glow quickly fled from the skies, and then inky blackness would grip the earth. The moon they could not expect until later on, for it had passed its full stage, and was on the decline.

Every one, therefore, was pleased when the experienced headman gave the signal to stop. They had reached the place where he intended to pitch the next camp. And as Ballyhoo Jones said to Jack, while they were arranging their waterproof tent:

“From the look on that black face of Marjuba I’ve got a sneaking notion he means to give us a little surprise tonight. Yes, and unless I miss my guess it’s going to be a foretaste of the glorious things to come.”

So camp was made, and as the sun disappeared from sight the fires were brightly burning there in the midst of that gloomy African forest, looking like stars of hope.

CHAPTER V

SURROUNDED BY A THOUSAND PERILS

"I'M as hungry as one of those jackals we saw hanging around the leavings of our game awhile ago," remarked Ballyhoo, as he proceeded to make himself comfortable at a place where he could watch all preparations for the evening meal progress.

Bingo the gun-bearer, having been in the harness for some weeks now, had actually learned how to cook pretty decently after the white man's fashion. He always waited on the "bwanas," and the cooking fires of the blacks were removed some little distance away, because it was not always pleasant for the boys to see how like near-cannibals they bolted their meat with but little scorching.

Of course, being accustomed to certain things all their lives, the boys had seen to it that their stores contained a goodly abundance of coffee, tea, sugar, tinned condensed milk and such foods. What was the use of having so numerous a retinue of broad-backed porters unless they could

pack these necessities along with them into the wilderness?

Darkness had already fallen like an inky mantle upon the earth. And it hardly came about before there commenced to arise isolated cries, and strange sounds that, gradually increasing as the night grew older, would in the end form a great chorus such as once heard could never be forgotten.

There was a papyrus swamp not far distant, from which depths the everlasting cries of the whimpering or fever owl welled. Then from here, there and everywhere broke forth a weird shrill sound that quickly excited the curiosity of Ballyhoo Jones.

"Great governor! Oscar, do you know what beastly thing is responsible for that awful screech? It's something new to me, for up to now we haven't been bothered with the same. If it means to keep up all night, it'll be worse than any frog chorus I ever listened to."

"I expect those are tree hyraxes making that hideous noise," the other replied. "And you might as well get used to it now as any old time, because you're apt to be sung to sleep by that song nearly every night from now on."

"Stung again!" chuckled Ballyhoo, making a grimace. "Accustomed to the still and delightful nights over in the woods of our country, we're going to meet with a rough deal here, seems like."

"Oh! that's a mere flea-bite to what you'll hear

later on," Jack told him, coolly. "Wait until the whole orchestra gets started. Those sounds are only the tuning-up of the fiddles and such instruments. Isn't that so, Oscar?"

"I guess you're right, Jack," the naturalist of the expedition assured him. "But we'll know a lot more about that by morning, perhaps."

"There, I can hear hyenas moaning, and jackals yapping not far away," continued Jack. "They'll hang around all night long, and even creep into the camp if they are very hungry, and have reason to think every one of the two-legged creatures is sound asleep."

"Whoo! me to wrap up my legs good and tight, then!" cried Ballyhoo, looking positively alarmed. "Course I know they can't really run away with a fellow, but all the same I don't like the idea of having a chunk taken out of my calf while I sleep. An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure with me."

"Oh! well," yawned Jack, "you can sit up all night on guard, with your gun, if you feel that nervous. But here's Bingo telling us supper is served, so let's get busy, fellows."

By the time they had finished their meal it was really difficult to converse without raising their voices, such was the babel of confusion with the mixed voices of the African night around them. Out on the veldt and deeper in the forest arose a vast conglomeration of sounds.

"Seems like all these animals must sleep in the daytime," said Ballyhoo, listening, "and issue

forth from their dens when dark comes, to hunt their prey, and roam around, lifting up their melodious voices in grumbles, shrieks, groans and all sorts of horrible sounds."

"I've read how an African night is the noisiest thing going," declared Jack, "and now I believe it. Still, it seems to keep right along growing all the time. They'll take the roof off pretty soon, I'm afraid."

They tried to pick out the various sounds, and guess what beast might be making the same. When in doubt they appealed to the grinning Bingo, who by signs and the strained use of his very limited English vocabulary managed to set them straight.

It was a hot, stifling night, too, so that the fires were only kept up for protection, and not because any one needed warmth. Of course, things would change along about midnight, as previous experience had told them, and a chill was apt to fall upon the earth. This happens regularly in tropical parts, even on a desert which during the day is unbearable with heat.

Besides the continual moaning of the lurking and half starved hyenas, and the snappy barks of the smaller jackals, they could detect the boom of ostriches out on the veldt, the peculiar neigh of the zebras, more like a bark than anything else, and strange sounds possibly emitted by hartebeeste or wildebeeste, perhaps a buffalo, or a passing rhinoceros.

Then that shrill cadence of the multitude of tree

frogs seemed like the orchestral accompaniment to the chorus.

Taken in all, the clamor was deafening, but just as had been said, they must make up their minds to get used to it, for nothing could be done to change the conditions. When one has been venturesome enough to plunge into the heart of the big game African country he must go prepared to endure all manner of discomforts, and stand privations, at the same time meeting with a variety of perils that could not well be matched anywhere else on earth.

All at once this vast chorus ceased as if by magic! The boys started halfway to their feet, and stared at one another. There was a good reason too why they should reach out eager hands for the faithful guns that stood ever ready nearby.

A terrible rumbling sound had broken forth. It grew louder and louder continually, and more hollow, and was peculiarly terrifying, ending with several distinct grunting coughs.

"Whew! a lion roaring?" exclaimed Ballyhoo Jones, who ought to recognize the sound if any one could, because he had done his best to imitate it for a long time past.

Both the other boys had heard that sort of roar in menageries, but it is one thing to listen to a lion, knowing that the king of beasts is snugly held back of steel bars, and to harken to his trumpet of defiance with the full knowledge that the terrible beast is wild, and footfree, loose in his native forest, and not a quarter of a mile it

may be away from the camp which they occupied.

"Did you ever hear the equal of that?" demanded Oscar, with kindling eyes. "Now we know why the lion is called the king of beasts. Every other animal acknowledges his sovereignty. Why, even the miserable tree-toads have stopped their serenade to give him the full stage. For the moment the forest is as still as death."

"It's certainly wonderful, that's what," admitted Ballyhoo. "And, boys, hearing Leo let out his bazoo like that makes me remember a little thrilling experience some of us once had with one of his species, when there was a break from the cage in Barley's circus, and we had a hand in beating the beasts back with red-hot irons."*

The lull was not for long. Presently some of the hyraxes started in again; other sounds joined, and in the end the confusion of sounds was as bad as ever.

Still every now and then as the night wore on whenever a lion would give tongue the mighty chorus came to an abrupt pause, as if in respect to his vocal powers.

Before the boys concluded to enter their tent and seek to obtain what rest the noisy night might afford them, the head man came along to try and have a little talk.

First of all he wished to tell them as best he could that by another sunset they would have arrived at the first stop, where many great pictures

* "The Motion Picture Boys' Great Venture."

could be taken. He assured them that if they considered this wonderful game country they should wait until they saw what he was about to show them; which information caused Ballyhoo to open his eyes until they were round with wonder.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLACK RHINOCEROS

At times during the earlier evening the blacks at their fires, having gorged themselves with food, chanted some of their weird savage songs. The boys had shown considerable interest in this weird singing. In many ways it resembled efforts of the Philippine Igrottes they had once heard with a traveling show, which fact caused the observing Oscar to remark that he believed nearly all savage people had similar ways of dancing and singing.

The lion dance, which some of the porters under the headman once danced for the edification of their young employers, was very much like the buffalo dance of the American Indians, or the war dance of the Philippine Islanders. In all cases the native spectators, whether women or men, keep crooning to the wild music of drums and reed instruments, while the dancers crouch, and assume dramatic attitudes in circling around, meanwhile indulging in all sorts of extravagant gestures, as though killing an enemy or a great shaggy-maned lion.

At last, however, it was time to get some sleep. The headman gave his order that the singing must cease; and black forms were soon sprawled here and there over the green sward. It might be noticed, however, that these fellows always chose to lie between fires. This was to prevent a catastrophe in the night, for lions had been known to invade even a big camp, and carry off a native as a dog would a ham bone.

Oscar had also seen to it that their tent was protected. He meant to be up more than a few times himself; and then there was faithful Bingo to attend to the fires on three sides of the structure.

It was a long, tiresome night. None of the boys obtained much restful sleep. That dreadful chorus, with its frequent interruptions; the awful roar of the prowling king of the jungle, and besides the heat inside their tent, caused partly by the adjacent necessary fires, all combined to make them restless.

Every one was glad when the dawn came, even though the day promised to be a repetition of the preceding hot one. The heavens were bathed in streamers of red even while the earth still seemed to rest in misty pall; but this soon lifted, and the day had really begun.

They were early on their way, anxious to arrive at the place where they intended spending some weeks, it might be, taking motion pictures of the wonderful things old Marjuba had promised they should find awaiting them.

Pretty soon Bingo was seen beckoning them to join him. He stood outside the line of moving figures, and was pointing at the ground.

"He's discovered some spoor that he wants us to notice!" remarked Oscar, as they hastened to join the gun-bearer.

Just as the boy had guessed, they found plain impressions of a mighty paw upon the ground. It looked like that of a Newfoundland dog, only many times larger.

"One of the prowling lions came along here, seems like," observed Ballyhoo, as he dropped down and ran his fingers eagerly in the imprint of that massive foot.

The sight naturally interested them, for it was the first time any of the trio had ever come in contact with a lion's spoor in the open. Just to imagine the big tawny beast moving along here, perhaps stopping to let forth one of those resonant roars, was enough to thrill them to the bone.

Then an hour afterwards the eager Bingo again beckoned to them to once more see something. They guessed what it was as they advanced, for there were plain signs that an elephant herd had spent some time recently on the spot. Young trees had been ridden down and stripped of their foliage; others were broken off short at the stump; while all around could be seen odd looking indentations in the soil, each showing the plain marks of the animal's size.

"Some of them must have been whoppers too!" declared the deeply interested Ballyhoo, as he ran

around observing everything with eagerness; "and, would you believe it, here's a baby footprint in the bargain? What a pity, Jack, you couldn't have been hiding in a tree nearby, and got a cracking good picture of this herd at play."

"Oh! I'll find plenty of chances for that before long, I guess," the photographic expert assured him. "That telephoto lens of mine works splendidly, so far as I've tried it out, and I'm expecting to get all sorts of wonderful things, without having to creep up close to the scene, and run the chance of scaring the beasts."

So the middle of that day found them. All along they had seen increasing signs to tell that they were now well in the heart of the famous big game country, the finest left almost untouched in all Africa.

Things often happen unexpectedly in such a region as this. It paid them to keep continually on the alert for dangers that might be lurking in their path. These were not always in the shape of hanging boa constrictors, or deadly snakes of other varieties. Nor were they likely to run across a lion in the daytime, since, like other carnivorous beasts, these prowlers hide in their dens, to sleep away the period of light.

Suddenly shouts broke forth from the porters of the safari who, marching in single file, had been steadily following in the wake of the headman.

They could be seen wildly scattering again. Some were even dropping their packs to the ground, and Jack congratulated himself that he

had been wise enough to keep his precious cameras in safe hands.

"Another boa, mebbe!" yelled Ballyhoo Jones excitedly.

"Not this time!" cried Oscar, whose quick eye had already caught sight of a charging monster that was making headlong for the scattering blacks.

When Ballyhoo glimpsed the same, he knew instantly what sort of beast they had to contend with. The ugly looking, slightly curved horn that projected from the snout of the lowered head spelled rhinoceros to him, likewise the strange corded hide of the brute.

The boys had all along heard that these beasts were possessed of nasty tempers, and liable to charge on the least provocation. Sometimes, as in the case of Phelim O'Rourke, one will plunge madly at a camp fire, and woe to the unlucky wretch who is unable to get out of his way.

Oscar and Ballyhoo Jones started forward, while of course Jack, having his precious cameras to consider, could only hasten to get the one he was carrying placed, so that he could make sure of securing that vivid scene before the end came.

The picture was a pretty exciting one while it lasted, what with the scurrying shrieking blacks, the charging beast, and back of all that tropical scenery. Jack hugged himself afterwards to remember how quickly he had been able to get busy, thanks to his having practiced that act diligently in times past.

Then their rifles began to speak. Both boys had reason to believe their aim was perfect, and that every bullet found its mark; still for a brief space of time it seemed as though they might as well have been firing against the side of an ironwood tree, tough enough to turn the edge of an ax.

There is no animal in the African forest that can stand such hammering as one of those tough-hided rhinos. Indeed, only our own terrible grizzly bear is able to endure more punishment.

But lead will tell, and in the midst of a new charge the ferocious beast was seen to suddenly come to a staggering pause, try to start again, reel, and then go down with a heavy thud that was drowned in the whoops of the delighted porters. How they rushed up, to plunge their spears into the side of the dead beast, and perhaps loudly defy him to injure them.

While Oscar and his chums had not come to this far-distant country especially to kill big game, they did expect to take a certain toll as they went. In the first place, they must have a certain amount of fresh meat. Some forty mouths had to be fed day after day, and gifted with enormous appetites as these men were, they could devour more food than could ever be transported thither on their backs.

Then, again, it would be silly not to accept the chance to say they had shot an elephant, a lion, or a buffalo while in this wonderful country. On other occasions it might be necessary for them to destroy some wild animal that had attacked the

bearers of the burdens, as in this instance with the black rhinoceros.

A short halt was made in order to allow the natives to cut choice portions from the slain animal, for they would eat anything, Ballyhoo often declared. As before, the keen-scented carrion birds were swinging in great circles overhead long before the offal was abandoned; and to the feast came also the four-footed scavenger tribes of the forest, the jackals and hyenas, to fight and tear until not a vestige of the rhinoceros, save its tough skin and a few bones, remained.

Again on the day's march did they come to another veldt, and discover that a multitude of animals browsed there. Of course, these took hasty flight after Ballyhoo had succeeded in shooting a buffalo that looked like a yearling to him, though he declared it resembled a Texas steer more than one of the shaggy-maned bison bull which like most American boys he had always associated with the name of buffalo.

And now, when the middle of that stifling afternoon had come, the headman approached the three whites again. Seeing this, Ballyhoo, who was panting, and sucking at his canteen every few minutes, having filled it at the last small water-hole, observed:

"Oh! don't I hope now he's going to tell us we'd better stop for the day here. I'm weak with the heat, and so much tramping, and I don't believe I could stand a whole lot more of this sort of thing."

Both the others were feeling in pretty much the same condition, and secretly joined Ballyhoo in that wish. It turned out as they hoped. Marjuba told them it was just as well that they made camp.

In his pidgin English he said that they were now well within half a mile of the great water-hole where the wild beasts trooped by scores and hundreds for a drink, some in the daytime, but the greater part after nightfall. He wanted them to keep far enough away so as not to alarm the moving hosts, until Jack could see with his own eyes, and lay plans for a conquest with his magic box.

Everybody seemed happy. The headman, however, had laid an injunction on the porters of the safari no longer to howl, and indulge in their usual chanting. They would break this law at their peril, for his arm knew well how to wield that tough leather whip which was known under the name of *kibobo*; already more than a few of the more reckless among the burden bearers had felt its sinuous lash wrap around their naked legs, bringing a sting, and a ring of blood with each application. So from that time on there was going to be peace and quiet in the camp of nights, a condition for which all the boys felt grateful.

Soon the camp was pitched. The fires of course had to be lighted, but Marjuba did not believe this fact would keep any of the animals away from their favorite "watering place," as Ballyhoo at once designated it.

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And before the night set in it was arranged that after an early supper Marjuba would lead them to the "show." They were to go prepared to spend the whole night in a tree, so that they could get an estimate of what amazing sights took place there between the setting and the rising of each day's sun.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT IN A TREE

"WE'D better take a blanket apiece with us," said Oscar, just as they finished supper, and began to prepare for the coming night.

"But, whew! it's so hot right now, will we find any use for such a thing?" objected Ballyhoo Jones, with a groan.

"You know there's hardly been a single night that it hasn't grown chilly along toward one or two in the morning," Jack told him.

"Yes," added Oscar, convincingly, "and you'll find a folded blanket worth its weight in gold for a soft cushion before you've been perched up in that tree many hours."

Ballyhoo gave in, as he always did when the argument squelched him. They were soon ready to follow after the headman, who, however, expected to return to the camp after seeing his masters safely ensconced amidst the branches of a tree, from which place they could watch the water-hole.

They arrived in the vicinity just as the sun was sinking out of sight, so all of the boys made haste

to climb up into the big tree while the light remained. It was advisable that they get located before darkness settled over the forest, since the declining moon would not appear until about midnight.

Everything seemed favorable, the headman told them. Even the sluggish air came toward them from the pool of water, which they could plainly see close by.

Then the headman departed, after giving them a last piece of advice, and the three venturesome chums found themselves alone among the branches of a tree in the midst of the darkening African forest.

"Oh! looky there, an elephant is coming down to the pool!" whispered Ballyhoo. "Now mebbe we'll see something worth all our trouble."

The big beast, which Oscar called an "old rogue," meaning that he must be detached from the herd, a bachelor, in fact, only bent on enjoying himself in life, entered the shallow water, and immediately commenced throwing a stream of the cooling liquid back over his hind quarters.

This was a sight well worth watching. Jack only wished he could manage to catch a similar one while daylight lasted; but taking pictures in the gathering dusk would have been impossible, and, indeed, he had not even bothered to fetch one of the cameras along.

The darkness was soon around them. They lost all track of the elephant, though from time to time the "swish" of water told that he still con-

tinued to make use of his trunk in order to cool his heated hide.

Presently from various sounds that floated to their ears the boys knew that other animals had also come to the waterhole, as was their nightly custom.

Listening, they could catch whinnies, the thud of many hoofs, and a number of other significant sounds, all of which thrilled them constantly. Of course, as long as that impenetrable pall hung over the landscape they could see absolutely nothing, and must take it out in guessing what sort of animals made all the different noises.

"Gee whiz!" Ballyhoo Jones whispered at one time, after a couple of hours had dragged by, "there must be wheens and wheens of 'em over there. Just listen to the trampling of hoofs, and the barks, and the neighs, as well as other sounds, will you? When will that silly old moon start to rise, I wonder?"

"More than two hours yet to wait," Oscar told him. "Better make yourself as comfy as you can, Ballyhoo. Here's a rope for you to tie yourself to the tree."

"But I'm not ready to hang myself just yet, Oscar," pleaded the other whimsically.

"You don't understand what I mean, Ballyhoo," he was told, in a cautious tone. "Any one of us is liable to drop to sleep some time or other, and suppose you lost your grip here and fell to the ground, you might break your leg, you know."

Ballyhoo might have even then continued his ob-

jections, but before he could say another word there welled up from below a sudden ominous deep-throated growl that chilled them all through and through.

Looking hastily down, they could make out what seemed to be twin circles of phosphorescence. These, they realized, were the eyes of a wild animal that had been passing under the tree at the time, and, hearing whispers above, gave them to understand that there was a law, even in this wilderness, with a penalty for breaking the same.

They knew that they were looking down at a lion, even though it was impossible to make out the beast's form in the darkness. Oscar gripped his rifle a little tighter, as did also Ballyhoo Jones. Nobody said a word, but they undoubtedly thought a whole lot in that minute of time during which the king of the forest stood below and looked up at the dark figures lodged in the tree.

"He's slipped away, don't you think, Oscar?" finally asked Ballyhoo, with a vein of utter relief in his manner.

"Yes, it seems so," he was told.

"Guess he didn't think it worth his while to try and get at us," continued the Jones boy; "though for that matter lions can't climb trees any more'n dogs can. All the same, I'm glad he quit. Lions may be all very well in the daylight; when a fellow can see what they're up to; but excuse me from running against one after it's as dark as we have it here."

"Keep still, Ballyhoo!" warned Jack.

They continued to sit there and listen after that. New and surprising sounds drifted to their ears from time to time, making Ballyhoo more impatient than ever for that old sluggish moon to rise in the East, and give them a chance to use their eyes to advantage.

Slowly passed the time. Ballyhoo had hastened to make a good use of his section of rope after that experience with the prowling lion. He realized that should he drop into a sleep and lose his hold, the chances of getting hurt in falling might not be the only grave peril that menaced him. What if he dropped before a waiting carnivorous animal like that lion? He made doubly sure that no matter what happened, at least he must remain there in the tree.

And he did doze more than a few times later on. Perhaps the other boys were guilty of the same weakness, though they said nothing. Once Oscar had settled the positions of the bright planets in the dark arch above and he could easily tell how time was passing without having to look at his watch by means of a match. So a fair knowledge of woodcraft comes in handy, no matter where one may roam.

Ballyhoo was dreaming he occupied his own bed at home, and that some one was engaged in trying to stick pins in him, when suddenly arousing he found that it was only Jack pinching his leg.

"Wake up, Ballyhoo!" whispered the other.

"Hey! what's happening now?" gasped the alarmed boy, as the full significance of his sur-

roundings flashed upon him; and possibly he had a thrill pass over his frame as a possibility of their being attacked by some savage beast assailed him.

"Nothing," said Jack, "only the moon's come up, you ought to know, and already we can see something of what's going on over there by the pool."

Of course this eased Ballyhoo's mind, and he proceeded to strain his eyes in the endeavor to see what Jack had spoken of.

Yes, the moon, partly worn away on one side, had come above the horizon, and was now some little distance up in the clear heavens. No longer did that terrible blackness hang over the earth like a pall. The clear white light chased many of the shadows to their hiding-places. And, looking across the intervening strip of clear ground, Ballyhoo could see moving figures about and in the pool.

No matter how brightly the moon may shine, at a little distance it is hard to distinguish the difference between a stump in the road and a cow lying down, as many a country boy will attest. Consequently, while the three in their tree hiding-place could make out the different kinds of animals congregated about that water-hole, they failed to see things as perfectly as they might have wished.

Still, the sight was a wonderful one. They could make out a dozen different species of animals there at the one time. These consisted of

everything from a gigantic elephant down to a wart-hog. Even the long-necked giraffes were stalking about on their slender legs that looked so like stilts; while buffaloes rolled in the edges of the pool, just as Ballyhoo had often seen horses and cows at home do on a hot day.

Long they sat there and strained their vision to see what was going on. When a herd of at least a dozen elephants came stalking down, the excitement gripped Ballyhoo with feverish force.

"What a pity you can't get that bunch right as it stands, Jack," he whispered as the herd disappeared in the water, and they could hear the swish of the numerous streams that were being directed as a cooling shower.

"All in good time, my boy," Jack told him. "I'm only prospecting tonight. Then, after I get the lay of the land, I can arrange my plan of campaign. Mark this, Ballyhoo, with reasonable good luck attending me, I'll not clear out of this region until I've captured about everything in sight."

"Which you'll do, all right, Jack, believe me," added Oscar, who knew of old how set in his ways the other could be, and also what a positive genius he had shown in accomplishing things along his chosen line.

Tired nature at last caused them to settle down, and try to catch some much needed sleep. Those wonderful sights were all very well in their way, but one could not expect to stay up the whole night just staring and staring. Besides, the moon-

light was so deceptive that things were far from showing up as clearly as the boys would have liked.

Jack had announced his intention of falling back and getting some sleep, having beforehand arranged his blanket around him. The night air was no longer humid, but seemed to have a peculiar chill about it that would soon penetrate to the bone unless due precautions were taken.

Then Oscar followed his sensible example; and in the end even Ballyhoo, finding his eyes beginning to smart him, due to the strain, decided that it would be foolish to try to hold out any longer.

And there they slept, occasionally waking up to take another look, and always finding the conditions about the same. Throughout the livelong night there were plenty of animals enjoying that favorite pool. No doubt, as the headman had told them, all through the day they would also be coming along, though not in such enormous numbers as during the period of darkness.

When finally Oscar discovered a warm tint in the eastern sky, he knew the long night was over. Soon another scorching day would be upon them, but at least it afforded some relief to remember that they did not have to march mile after mile between the rising and setting of the sun.

Until the day was fully broken, none of them thought of dropping down from their perches, for some lurking beast might take umbrage on account of their presence, and offer a challenge that they hardly felt like accepting.

CHAPTER VIII

FACE TO FACE WITH A LION

WHEN finally it was decided that it would be safe for them to leave their elevated positions, and once more seek the ground, the three boys started to do so.

"Whoo! look out, fellows, what you're doing!" exclaimed Ballyhoo, catching hold of a branch just in time to save himself from a nasty fall. "Why, I haven't got any legs at all, seems like! I'm clean numb all the way down. Didn't you say we were in the country of that awful sleeping sickness, Oscar? Oh! I hope now it hasn't grabbed hold of me!"

"Kick your feet on the limb as hard as you can, Ballyhoo!" Jack directed.

"But why should I do that, tell me?"

"Only that your legs have gone to sleep, owing to your sitting so long in one attitude, and in a strained position," explained the other. "I feel the same way as you do; and now needles and pins are beginning to shoot all through my legs. You've got to get the stagnant blood in circulation first, understand."

When thus assured that nothing so very ter-

rible was the matter with him, Ballyhoo commenced obeying directions. He quickly found relief, for as soon as his actions started the blood to circulating once more, the singular and alarming numbness began to leave his lower extremities.

Presently all of them were able to drop safely down from the tree, gather their possessions together, and make a start for the camp, distant not much more than half a mile as the crow flies.

"Well," remarked Ballyhoo Jones, who was a hard one to keep from talking at most times, "that was certainly an experience few American boys ever went through with. Fact is, I bet you there never before was a fellow of our age who sat up in a tree all night in the middle of a dense African forest, and watched hundreds of wild animals come to drink, or sport in a big pool like that."

Neither of the others seemed disposed to disagree with what Ballyhoo had said. In fact, they felt sure that such was the case. At least, they had never heard of any boy being taken into the jungle, either on a big-game hunt, or to secure flashlight or motion pictures of the dangerous denizens of the wilds in their home haunts.

Ballyhoo was soon commencing to sniff the air.

"Think you smell breakfast cooking, don't you?" chuckled Jack, noticing this suggestive action on the part of the other; as a rule the Jones boy was ready for his feed three times a day, and would hardly have complained if the number had been raised to four.

"Oh! it might only have been my vivid imagination," explained Ballyhoo, with one of those comical shrugs of his shoulders that always excited the mirth of his comrades. "But, somehow, sitting up in a tree all night does give a fellow a keen appetite."

"Hold up!" exclaimed Oscar, suddenly, "there's something moving back of those bushes ahead."

There certainly was, for even as he hissed these words the startled eyes of the three boys saw a great head projected. Then a lordly lion trotted forth, and turned his majestic gaze full upon these ridiculous invaders of his august domain.

He was a monster, for a fact, with the largest head and mane any of them had ever beheld. Perhaps a lively imagination had something to do with the matter, but it was always the positive opinion of Ballyhoo Jones, at least, that those captive lions of the old Barley Circus were small and tame looking beside this splendid beast.

Switching his knobbed tail spasmodically back and forth, he stood and looked at them. It was one of the most thrilling experiences in their whole careers, and would never be forgotten. Only forty feet, fifty at a pinch, lay between them and that savage creature. If he took a sudden notion to attack them, a few bounds would cover this territory.

"Wait, don't shoot yet!" hissed Oscar, regaining his nerve.

A slight movement alongside had given him the

idea that Ballyhoo Jones, carrying the other rifle, might in his excitement be tempted to make use of it, and with disastrous results.

"All right, Oscar, I'm only getting ready in case he takes a notion to come this way. I'm not hankering after a row with *that* beaut, let me tell you."

Ballyhoo was trying to speak without letting his lips quiver, but it was easy to see that he must be shivering, with all the excitement. So they stood facing the animal, that continued to stand there and watch them, just as a great St. Bernard dog might disdainfully observe several small atoms of the species frisking near by.

Jack was disconsolate. How silly of him to come away from camp without one of his cameras. He mentally promised himself that it should never happen again. Before his eyes he saw that old but true refrain running: "What strange things you see when you haven't got a gun!"

"Steady, everybody!" said Oscar. "Just keep eyeing him for all you're worth. He's getting uneasy right now, and I think means to cut stick and go away, under the belief that he hasn't any quarrel with such a queer bunch as we seem."

Indeed, a minute afterwards and the lordly lion actually elevated his head, gave a disdainful sniff toward them, as though he didn't exactly like their scent, and then deliberately trotted off.

They followed him with their eyes until the tawny form was lost amidst the tangled jungle growth beyond.

"Well, that was a lively experience while it lasted," chuckled Oscar; "and I'm glad to see that he hasn't headed toward the camp, for then we'd have stood a continual risk of running on him again as we went ahead."

Jack was shaking his head sadly.

"You'll never catch me again going unloaded on any sort of trip," he complained bitterly. "Think what a picture he made standing there with that tail of his jerking back and forth. Oh! it's a shame, that's what it is, and I'm a fool."

The others tried to comfort him by saying that no doubt other occasions would crop up when he might have just as good a chance to secure a picture of the king of wild beasts in his native haunts, but Jack was inconsolable.

"He might have attacked us if you started with your crank!" observed Ballyhoo.

"That's where I differ with you," said Oscar. "A lion is a peculiar beast. In some ways he's utterly fearless, and then in others he shows a streak of caution. They say he never likes to attack anything that's strange to him. The grinding noise of that camera crank may have bothered him, and actually caused him to turn tail."

"Well, now, mebbe you're right, Oscar," admitted Ballyhoo, thoughtfully. "When I stop to think, I remember a number of instances I've read about where lions or tigers have been frightened off by men who kept their wits about them. One was of a drummer in India who, when confronted by a man-eating tiger, and being unarmed,

smashed in the head of his drum, clapped the thing on his head, and then boldly started toward the beast. It turned tail and sneaked off, never having seen such a queer object before."

"Yes," added Oscar, "and another case I remember reading about was even stranger than that. The man, acting on an inspiration, when a lion suddenly jumped out in his path, threw himself heels up in the air, and began walking on his hands, with his legs wildly kicking overhead. And the lion, after taking one look, concluded he didn't want anything to do with such a combination as that."

"Don't forget, Ballyhoo," said Jack, laughing, "you're something of a hand at doing such eccentric stunts, and in a pinch you might save us from having a warm time of it."

So chatting, and also keeping a close watch for any sign of trouble as they walked, the three finally arrived within sight of the camp, where the blacks under the guidance of the headman, Marjuba, were already busily engaged cooking meat for their breakfast.

Later on Oscar and his chums, seated on a log, were enjoying a meal, after which they concluded to retire to the tent and get a few hours of sleep.

CHAPTER IX

THE PICTURE HUNTERS

THAT was to be a day given over pretty much to rest. The blacks lay around, quite content to take things easy. Above all, the law was laid down by the headman that there should be no singing or loud talk indulged in. Such things were apt to spread alarm throughout the whole region, and thus prevent the wild game from pursuing their customary habits.

Ballyhoo and Oscar did start out in a direction that would take them away from the water-hole. They had half a dozen of the beaters along with them, hoping to be able to secure some game. With that pack of camp followers to provide food for it would be necessary to do more or less hunting every day.

There was little difficulty experienced about getting a shot, for game was plentiful. By the time they reached the nearest open ground they found the veldt speckled with various groups of animals feeding on the fresh green grass. The wind being also in their favor, the boys were able to creep within easy range of some buffalo, and at

the report of their guns two of the animals came down.

They were back in camp before the middle of the day. As Ballyhoo said:

"Why, I never saw anything like it, the way the big game is met with around here. It's just like being on a farm, only instead of stepping out and knocking a chicken on the head, you walk a little ways and take your pick of a dozen different species of great big beasts."

He was feeling quite like a veteran big game hunter by this time. What sights they had already witnessed since landing at that coast town had by now become an everyday occurrence. And the events of the last night, followed by that thrilling encounter on the trail, just about capped the climax.

Jack was plainly feeling strangely, and Oscar believed he could give a pretty good guess as to what ailed the other.

"He's thinking all the time about his poor father, you see, Ballyhoo," was what he said to the Jones boy, when they sat together, and mention was made of Jack's moody manner.

"That's a fact, I guess he must be," Ballyhoo admitted, with a touch of sympathy in his voice. "Jack doesn't say much about it, but I kind of think he keeps hoping all the while he may run across some sort of clue out here to tell him just what did happen to his poor dad some years ago."

"Well, we know that it was on a trip to Africa that he disappeared and was never heard from

again," mused Oscar. "Either a wild beast got him, or else he was killed by some of the hostile blacks."

"Eh! do you think we stand a chance to run up against any tribe of blacks that might take a fancy to eating us, Oscar?" asked Ballyhoo, anxiously.

"Oh! hardly as bad as that," laughed the other. "They might torture us, or make slaves of us for the balance of our lives, but I don't believe there are real cannibals around here, like we used to read about in Robinson Crusoe."

"If they tried to make soup of *me*," threatened Ballyhoo, "I'd poison the whole lot, sure I would. I thought that all out before we started, and I'm carrying some arsenic along with me, just as a means of self-defense."

Later on Oscar, finding himself alone with Jack, tried to cheer the other up.

"I can guess what's in your thoughts so often, old fellow," he remarked, as he laid a hand on the other's shoulder. "Of course, being out here makes you remember that your father lost his life under African skies. And from what you've told me it may even have been within a hundred miles of here that he disappeared from the sight and knowledge of the world several years ago."

"That's what's in my mind pretty much all the time that I can think of anything outside of taking pictures, Oscar," the other frankly admitted. "I try to forget it the best I can; but when I wake up in the night I get to thinking and thinking, and somehow I seem to feel that before we go back

home again I may be able to find out just how he died. It would be some consolation, you see. This mystery about his fate is pretty hard to bear."

Oscar knew that Jack was thinking while he spoke of his mother so far away, who had consented to his coming on this long trip partly in the secret hope that the boy might learn of his father's fate.

It was a sad subject, and Oscar did not dare dwell long on it. He wanted to do all he could to cheer Jack up.

"How about our going over this afternoon, and taking up a watch in our tree observatory?" he asked, hoping to turn Jack's thoughts into another quarter.

"I was meaning to mention the same thing," the other told him, showing immediate attention, for anything connected with photography awakened his interest.

"It would do no harm, to begin with," continued Oscar, thoughtfully, "and there's no telling when we might get a chance to knock off an interesting beginning of a series of water-hole films that will make all others look small."

"Count me in with you," Jack told him. "I can understand to begin with that the only good clear pictures I'll be able to pick up must be taken by daylight. That tree is fairly close to the pond, and with my wonderful telephoto lens I can get as good results as if I stood thirty feet away from the moving panorama of wild beasts."

"Then it's agreed that along about the middle of the afternoon, when the heat lets up a bit, we'll hike across lots, and mount our tree observation post?"

"How about Ballyhoo?" asked Jack.

Oscar laughed.

"Oh! he's as good as vowed that nothing would tempt him to roost in that tree again until the soreness has left his legs. He was complaining all the time we were out hunting this morning, and wondering if those signs had anything to do with the sleeping sickness. Every time he yawned he would look guilty, and heave a big sigh."

"I guess he must have been reading some account of the terrible things to be looked for out here in Central Africa," continued Jack. "But with all this heat it's not strange we feel drowsy so much. Then the flies and insect pests are so troublesome we have to carry our head mosquito nets around with us all the time, so as to be prepared for the worst."

"Why not take our camp just as it looks now on a hot day?" suggested Oscar, as he noted a number of striking poses on the part of some of the blacks, with Ballyhoo dozing under a cheese-cloth canopy he had fastened in the shade under a thick tree.

This idea appealed to the ardent photographer, and presently the sound of the little crank attached to his camera told that he was taking advantage of the opportunity.

By this time everybody had become so accus-

tomed to that sound they did no more than open one eye on hearing it. Satisfied that no ferocious lion was threatening the camp, they dozed off again.

So noon found them, with a few of the blacks once more bending over the fires and cooking meat after their primitive fashion. Eating was half of living to them, and the rest of their time was taken up with sleeping, perhaps also in scratching numerous insect bites.

It required considerable grit to get up along about three in the afternoon and start forth through the broiling heat for a walk of half a mile. Ballyhoo shook his head vigorously in the negative when politely asked whether he would like to be one of the party.

"Have to excuse me this time, boys," he told them, languidly. "I haven't recovered from my night vigil yet. Besides, it's just as well that one of us sticks by the camp. These black boys want to be watched. What if they should take a sudden notion to desert us in a body, wouldn't we be up against it good and hard?"

"Make your mind easy about that, Ballyhoo," Oscar told him. "I've been told that they were never known to desert an expedition while the food supply held out. If we got in difficulties, I wouldn't be so sure of their sticking, though the headman and Bingo might hang on all right."

"Well, keep a watch for that old lion as you trail along, fellows," advised the one who had elected to remain behind. "And if he should

turn up, this time Jack you ought to be able to crack off his picture, and get that smile of his down pat."

They left Ballyhoo sprawled out under his insect proof canopy, and bent on taking things as easy as he could. No doubt he would be just as ambitious as ever by the time another day rolled around, and show a readiness to join them in any undertaking that might come up.

Of course there was no necessity for any one accompanying them, but Bingo, the faithful gun-bearer, had signified a desire to go along. As the camera was apt to prove something of a burden, Jack had willingly consented.

He trotted at the side of the owner of the "magic box," always proud to be given an opportunity to carry the precious object, which the superstitious blacks actually believed held the white boys' wonderful "god." All sorts of amazing things were attributed to this unseen but powerful agency, and it had considerable to do with making these wild spirits tractable.

All the way over Jack was secretly hoping they might again glimpse that monster lion. He kept on the alert every minute of the time, and had mapped out in his mind just what his course of action might be under such conditions.

On his part Oscar kept the heavy repeating rifle under his arm, and ready for instant work. But nothing happened to call for their attention. Once a small herd of eland burst from a thicket and dashed swiftly away on bounding hoofs; and

Jack was able to secure a view of their passing; but the lion was only conspicuous by his absence.

Arriving at the observation tree finally, they sat down to recuperate for a brief spell before trying to mount to their post of the preceding night. Then Jack started up, and was handed the camera. By easy stages they made the ascent, in the end reaching their former place of clear observation.

Looking off toward the pond, they saw that it was not entirely abandoned at this hour of the hot day. Some trees offered friendly shade, and under these, standing in the water, were a number of wild animals of several different species, all bent on the one object of cooling themselves, and keeping their legs free from the ravenous flies that doubtless scurried about in dense shoals.

"Just as we've seen our domestic cows stand for hours in a shady pool on a hot summer day, frisking their tails, and chewing their cud," remarked Oscar, as he sat there and took an observation.

Jack was busy with his camera. It was no easy task to get it fixed and stationary so that no matter how rapidly he turned the crank it would not shake and injure the picture. But he had thought out all such things beforehand, and come prepared to arrange matters to his complete satisfaction.

"There," he finally told Oscar, "I've got it fixed just as I want, and given half a chance I can get a bully broadside of anything worth while that happens over there at the pool."

CHAPTER X

ELEPHANT AGAINST RHINOCEROS

"ONE thing pleases me," Jack was saying in a whisper later on, "which is that the light is strong, and everything any one could want in a picture. If I take a notion to cut loose over there I'll get some sharp contrasts, and clear-cut pictures."

"Well, if you take a look over beyond," said Oscar, "you may think that chance is going to come along."

"Elephants, as sure as you live!" muttered the photographer, with a tinge of eagerness in his voice. "And a whole herd of 'em, in the bargain. Must be the same lot we saw in the moonlight last night. They think they've got a mortgage on this pool, and drop in whenever the heat drives them out of the woods."

He prepared to start things going should the oncoming mammoth beasts commence throwing the water over themselves and each other in play, as usually happens.

Apparently the elephants had no suspicion of any danger, for led by a tremendous bull with

one broken tusk, they moved steadily forward until finally with squeals of satisfaction they waded knee deep into the big pool. Here they immediately commenced disporting themselves very much like a pack of boys at play in the water during the dog-days over home, the younger ones chasing each other, and actually playing elephantine tricks, it seemed to Oscar.

Jack was busy with his crank, and the steady grind told that he considered this a worthy picture for his zeal, one that would call for considerable praise when later on shown to the American public.

"Over on the far side of the water, Jack," Oscar was saying, "there's a tremendous object that looks something like a log, but it's a big crocodile instead. I wish he'd get into the picture; and as sure as you live he means to, for there he's opening his whopping jaws, and you can see those small birds walking right in to snap up the flies. Now he's moving toward the water, and you're going to get him in first-class. Thanks, old chap, good-bye for the present."

The crocodile had taken a plunge, and vanished amidst a swirl of bubbles and foam, all of which, doubtless, would be seen when Jack's wonderful picture was later on developed and run on the screen.

Having given as much film to the elephant frolic as he thought he could spare, Jack stopped grinding. Other scenes might develop while they were up there in the tree observatory, and he

wished to be prepared for whatever came along. Variety in such a series of pictures adds to their charm; since at best they are supposed to be fugitive glimpses into the lives of the African jungle folks.

The boys sat there for some time watching, and commenting in low tones on what was taking place over at the pond. Some of the elephants had left the water now and were idly wagging their great fan-like ears as they stood on the shore. The younger element appeared not to know when they had had enough of the water, but continued to dip their trunks in, and cast streams backward, or against each other's sides.

Suddenly the boys heard a trumpet-like sound. The big leader of the herd was observed to show considerable excitement, treading first on one foot and then another, always swinging his trunk high in the air, and continuing to give forth those stirring sounds.

"He's evidently getting mad over something, Oscar," said Jack; "do you think he can have scented us away over here?"

"No, because the wind is coming from the pool to this tree," replied the other, and turning to Bingo he went on to say: "What ails the old rascal, do you think, Bingo; what makes him act like that?"

"Huh! smell him one-horn," replied the gun-bearer, whose knowledge of English was quite extensive, for he knew at least two dozen words.

"Oh! he must mean a rhinoceros!" exclaimed

Jack, recognizing the term employed by the black; "yes, and as sure as you live there the beast comes dashing out of that thicket. Oh! I must get this all in, for perhaps we're going to be treated to a regular animal duel."

"Just what's in the wind, as sure as you live," asserted Oscar, as he too glued his eyes on the picture, while Jack commenced turning the crank, desirous of securing the serial from its beginning. "They're old rivals in the ring, I warrant you, from the way they act. Perhaps in a former fight the elephant had that tusk of his broken off at the tip. Look at him stamping, will you, and doesn't he act mad, though?"

So did the black rhinoceros, for that matter, though in a different way. He pushed forward in a deliberate fashion, as though to give due warning that anything venturesome enough to get in his way must stand for the consequences. And that odd, cruel looking curved horn projecting from his sturdy nose had a wicked slant to it, both boys concluded.

In fact, they were just as well satisfied that they happened to be safely perched where they were, and not in range of the charging rhinoceros.

Oscar held his breath when he saw the beast make a swift lunge. The clumsy elephant proved game, though taken at a disadvantage. He was fighting before the eyes of his whole family, and would sooner die than show a cowardly streak.

It was a fierce concussion when the two huge bodies came in contact. Squeals of either rage or

pain could be plainly heard. The rhinoceros had struck deeply, for Oscar noted that a grievous wound had been opened in the side of the bull elephant just back of the foreleg.

"Oh! the cunning of the vicious black charger," Oscar was saying to himself; "he's aiming for a vital spot right in the start. It's two to one the rhino will win the victory, and later on we may get possession of those tusks. There he goes at his huge antagonist like chain lightning. Wow! listen to that impact, would you? And the elephant managed to dig his one good ivory into the scaly side of his enemy, too! It's give and take all around! Getting it all are you, Jack?"

"You just bet I'm busy," wheezed the other, drops of perspiration standing out on his forehead as he continued to work frantically at his crank. "This alone is worth coming five hundred miles to see! I've dreamed of such things, but here's the real scrap right before our eyes. Don't you think the rhino will win, Oscar?"

"Bound to, barring accidents," the other snapped, never once taking his eyes off the entrancing spectacle of the animal duel. "He's got all the advantage, being much more spry than the old bull. Then, again, his hide is like steel. You can see how sometimes the tusk of the elephant just slides along it without being able to push through, even when backed by all that bulk."

The other elephants did not seem to be greatly concerned about the outcome. Several stood around, and the youngsters had ceased to splash

and throw the water, but there was no sign of anxiety or fear as to the result.

"If the old leader goes down," remarked Oscar, noting these strange facts, "some younger bull is ready to step into his place. This thing must be a personal affair between the two engaged, and the others don't seem to be bothered about it."

"It's the law of the wild," asserted Jack. "The one best fitted survives, and so it's always been going on for ages and ages. Oh! did you hear that blow, though? I guess the old bull must be getting groggy on his pins, and he's bleeding like a stuck pig, in the bargain."

"Yes, it's one-sided now," Oscar added, "and I'm a little sorry, because of the two I'd like to see the elephant win out. That old tusker has been through heaps during his life of a hundred or more years, but his time has come at last. See how he rolls like a ship at sea. That's a sign he's growing weaker and weaker. One or two more good knocks and he'll drop over, all in."

"I only hope my film doesn't give out before that happens," groaned Jack. "That would be a terrible calamity for me, I tell you. But I expect it'll hold out for some time yet."

"Now watch what happens!" exclaimed the other in a tense voice, "for the rhino is going to dash in again. See how ugly he looks, that horn of his crimson with the poor old elephant's life-blood. There he starts on his drive."

Even as Oscar said this there was heard a ter-

rific crash as the head of the little black monster came against the side of the mammoth tusker. Plainly following this came what seemed like a great sigh. Then the huge bulk of the stricken bull went crashing to the earth. The boys believed they could even feel the tree in which they were perched quiver with the shock as his body struck the ground.

The victorious rhinoceros stood by the body of his victim. Oscar believed the beast might suspect that the elephant was playing a trick, with the intention of deceiving him; and that was why he several times plunged with full force against the fallen mammoth.

Finally convinced that the long standing vendetta had been brought to a successful conclusion, the black victor gave several loud disdainful grunts as a challenge that was not accepted, and then trotted away as if he felt that he had done a good day's work.

Jack gave a sigh and ceased grinding.

"I got it all in, Oscar, every bit!" he exclaimed delightedly; "and, say, what a dandy that will make, if all goes well in the development. Why, if we had arranged all the details ourselves, and paid a royal big sum for reserved seats in the arena, we couldn't have bettered things a whit. That's going to be a screamer of a hit; no one has ever before had the good luck to snap off a fight between two such animals as those."

Oscar shared in the satisfaction which his chum was giving tongue to in this extravagant fashion.

He, too, felt they had been highly favored in being allowed to watch that desperate battle between two monster denizens of the African wilds.

They continued to sit there and observe all that went on over at the pool, but nothing occurred worth trying to conserve, according to Jack's mind. His ideas had been lifted to a higher level latterly, and he felt that only the most novel effects were worthy of the attention of a true artist. Each picture he hoped to make a prize that would elicit unbounded praise from future audiences.

Finally, when the afternoon was well along, they concluded they had done enough for one day. Accordingly, they descended from the tree, and Bingo shouldered the camera for the return.

Again they both kept on the alert for signs of the lion, but apparently the king of beasts had deserted his former retreat, for they saw nothing of him all the way to the camp.

"No hurry about trying to get those big tusks, I suppose?" Jack had queried as they took their time covering the half mile of distance.

"Oh! give the hyenas and jackals a decent chance to clean up the bones of the old elephant," laughed Oscar. "When they do that it'll make the job easier for us. And every time we look at those tusks, Jack, our minds will go back to the wonderful sight we saw this afternoon. Poor old chap, it was hard to be knocked out right under the eyes of all his relations too; but such is fate in the jungle!"

CHAPTER XI

PAYING THE PENALTY

"ONE thing I'm glad of," remarked Jack, as they drew near the camp, "which is that we decided to take Bingo along with us. That outfit must weigh a whole lot more than seventy pounds, and with the weather as hot as it keeps, both of us would be tired to death lugging it."

"But Bingo, shining with perspiration, seems to be as happy as a king," chuckled Oscar. "A chance like that comes seldom in the lifetime of a black. He'll feel as proud as anything to remember that he toted the house of a wonderful little speaking god on his shoulder."

When they reached camp, the first thing they looked for was Ballyhoo Jones. To their surprise, his cheery hail failed to greet them, asking what luck had fallen to their portion.

"Bwana Hoohoo he go hunt some!" explained the headman, upon being questioned.

Oscar and Jack looked not only interested but worried. They asked further questions, and received the information that Ballyhoo Jones had loitered around for a short time, and then suddenly took up his repeating rifle, saying that he

guessed he'd take a little saunter around to see if he could knock over one of those nice little gazelles for his supper.

So he had walked away, nor had any one heard a thing from him since. That must have been all of two hours back, Marjuba, the headman declared, comparing the passage of time with the previous position of the sun.

"He may turn up any minute now," Jack was saying, but in spite of his brave words he still continued to look serious.

Time passed. The sun sank low, and night would soon be at hand.

"Hadn't we better shout, and fire our guns, Oscar?" suggested Jack.

"I was just thinking of that myself," came the answer. "It wouldn't do any harm, and might give him an idea of his whereabouts, providing that he could locate the sounds."

So they proceeded to follow out the plan. Even the blacks were urged to join with a series of wild yells, in the hope that the volume of sound might reach the listening ear of Ballyhoo.

Then silence was imposed, and they waited to ascertain whether there would be any result. Nothing was heard in any quarter, though doubtless the racket must have frightened away what animals chanced to be at or near the pool.

"Doesn't seem to work," suggested Jack, blankly. "Still, even if he heard, he may have made up his mind not to answer, since that would give him away as being lost."

"What I'm afraid of most," said Oscar, "is that he's wandered so far away from here that the noise failed to reach him."

"What, all that whooping, and the discharge of our guns besides?" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes, but the wind is against us, you may not have noticed," Oscar explained.

"Why, so it is," admitted the other, noticing this fact for the first time; "and if Ballyhoo is a mile away he might not have heard a thing. What shall we do, Oscar?"

"There's nothing we can do just now, and that's a fact," said the second boy, shaking his head seriously. "We'll have big fires built, and keep them up through the entire night. Then if Ballyhoo chances to be where he can glimpse the light in the sky, he ought to get his bearings."

"Small chance of his arriving after dark sets in," asserted Jack.

"I think myself, knowing Ballyhoo so well," he went on to say, meditatively, "that he'll hunt up some good tree and climb it, to settle down in a crotch, waiting for the coming of the dawn."

"And he did complain of sitting there so long in our observation tree," Jack recalled. "I wonder how he'll like it spending another night in one, and this time without a soft blanket to help out."

"I'm sorry for Ballyhoo," Oscar added. "The lesson may do him considerable good, though. It was mighty foolish for him to start out at all without having several of the blacks trailing along."

The fires were burning briskly when Oscar and Jack sat down to eat the supper Bingo had cooked for them. Cheerful though the scene looked, with the light-hearted burden-bearers gathered around various fires, and cooking their allotment of meat, it did not lift the heavy feeling from the boys' hearts, for they could think of nothing else save the absent Ballyhoo.

Long they sat up. Occasionally Oscar would get on his feet and listen in the hope of catching the distant report of a gun, but meeting with absolutely no success.

Besides, it seemed to them that the nightly chorus was rising and falling with more vigor than they had ever heard it, every insect and animal striving to outdo previous efforts. It grew to be fairly deafening at times, and finally Oscar gave up all hope of seeing anything of the missing comrade that night.

They slept poorly, all things considered, yet it was their worry more than any annoyance from that vast volume of sound that kept them wakeful. The night seemed interminably long, and Jack heaved a sigh of intense relief when finally he discovered faint signs of the dawn breaking.

An early breakfast over, they made immediate preparations for trying to find poor Ballyhoo. Bingo and half a dozen of the best men were chosen to accompany them. Although Oscar believed that he knew considerable along the art of trail following, he was only too willing to take advice from one who had been born and raised

under an African sky, and who consequently should be better posted than himself.

They started forth. Bingo entered into the game with spirit, as though he really enjoyed showing what he knew about following the tracks left by a wandering hunter. Besides this, he was really greatly interested in finding Ballyhoo, who by his cheery ways had endeared himself to the native gun-bearer.

They left the camp behind them. Oscar had his compass along, while one of the blacks carried a camera; for, as Jack said, he wanted to be prepared in case they by any accident ran upon a picture well worth capturing.

"You don't think he's fallen into the hands of any band of wandering natives, do you, Oscar?" Jack was saying, after they had been all of two hours following the trail, and with very good success, having lost it only twice, and then gone back to pick it up again.

"It's possible, but hardly probable," was the other's comment; in fact, Oscar had himself considered that before, and concluded to say nothing about it. "The chances are he's just got lost, and had to stay out all night. And now that we've come this far we might fire a few shots in hopes of getting an answer."

Jack thought that a good suggestion, and accordingly they acted on it. Then both listened anxiously, but only to meet with disappointment.

"Queer that he couldn't have heard all that row if he was within a mile or more of this spot,"

"He may be asleep after a wakeful night," Oscar went on to say, trying to make the best of the situation, as was his usual way. "Then, again, something might have happened so that he couldn't use his gun. I've known a fellow to be kept up in a tree all night by some wild dogs, with his rifle on the ground and beyond his reach. Let's hope for the best, anyway, Jack."

They continued to move along. The trail kept up, though Oscar had some time ago become convinced that the marks were made before night-fall, since the heavy dew had fallen in the foot-prints in many places.

"We've yet to run across the place where he spent the night," he was telling Jack, when all at once Bingo made signs that caused the blood to leap through the veins of the chums faster than its wont.

"He's pointing to that immense tree just ahead of us, you can see, Oscar," said Jack, eagerly. "The trail heads directly to it, and I bet you Ballyhoo spent the night among its branches. Oh! what have you run across now?" he added, trembling with a new apprehension when he saw Oscar bending down to examine something.

"Lions everywhere, the marks show!" exclaimed the other, pointing as he spoke.

"Why, it looks as if they kept moving around that particular tree!" Jack cried shortly afterwards.

"Just what happened," added the second boy, breathing heavily, and looking pale with a new

apprehension. "Ballyhoo must have taken refuge up there, and these hungry beasts kept guard below. Oh! what a terrible time the poor fellow must have had of it; when every time he looked down he could see their glowing eyes upturned. Then after the moon rose he could follow their slinking figures as they trotted back and forth."

"Can he still be up there, do you think, Oscar?"

"Hardly possible, but we'll soon know," replied the other. "Then if we get no answer to our hails we'll try to find marks to show where he came down and went away."

They proceeded to adopt this plan, and, meeting with no success, when they strained their eyes to peer amidst the thick branches, they commenced to call.

At first their efforts met with no reward. Oscar raised his voice and shouted louder than before.

To their astonishment, they now caught a muffled sound that may have been the voice of their chum, though there was nothing familiar about it. Nevertheless, they recognized English, and even the words could be grasped, though where they came from puzzled both boys tremendously.

"Ah! there, Jack, Oscar, how's the weather just now; and have the bally beasts trotted off at last, I want to know?"

CHAPTER XII

THE PRISONER OF THE HOLLOW TREE

WHEN Ballyhoo Jones conceived that foolish idea of wandering forth all by himself, "for a little look around," to see if he could find some game that would give them a change for supper, as he told himself, he never dreamed of all the trouble that was in store for him.

Later on, after doing considerable walking without seeming to run across a herd of the coveted gazelles, he awakened to the fact that he was a little mixed in his mind with regard to what direction he should take in order to return to the camp.

After changing his course a number of times, Ballyhoo admitted that he was "all balled up" with regard to localities. Then to his dismay it began to grow dusk, and he realized that he faced the grewsome prospect of spending a horrible night all alone in the depths of that African forest.

Coming on that big tree, he decided to stay there and build a fire under it. And then he had another bad shock, for not a single match could he discover in any of his pockets.

He felt angry with himself upon remembering how he had meant to lay in a stock, and then something else put the notion completely out of his head. This gloomy prospect alarmed the boy. He remembered what a terrible chorus of sounds had surrounded the camp on preceding nights, and how that terrible roar had awakened the echoes when the king of the jungle gave forth his defiance to all brute creation.

No matter whether the peril came to him from hyena, rhinoceros or lion, it was all very disagreeable, and Ballyhoo decided that he would be a fool to think of staying there on the ground to meet his fate, when such a noble tree offered shelter amidst its branches.

He hastened to climb up and ensconce himself in the easiest position he could find, near a gaping aperture that told of the main trunk being partly hollow. So long as no beast issued forth from that opening Ballyhoo did not care.

He made himself secure by means of a stout cord which luckily was discovered in a pocket of his coat. This precaution was taken on account what his chums had said about the danger of going to sleep, and falling down into the midst of possible prowling beasts below.

Then he waited.

In imagination he could see the jolly scene where the camp fires were burning, and he even sniffed the air several times as though he might be trying to believe he caught the delightful appetizing aroma of cooking meat.

Oh! how hungry he was. That tramp had put a fearful edge on his usually sturdy appetite, and Ballyhoo felt as though he could easily devour a whole little gazelle, and then not half try.

An eager search revealed only an old crust of bread, which had been baked in a double-pan arrangement thrust into the red ashes of the fire. How it came there he did not know, but he crunched it between his teeth almost savagely, and kept munching away as long as he could.

By now the sounds began to rise all around him. Ballyhoo quickly made up his mind it was going to be a night always to be remembered, and he expected that he and sleep would be strangers.

Often as he sat there listening and sighing, he told himself that he should not complain, because it served him just about right for being so silly as to wander around all by himself in that vast gloomy wilderness.

"If ever you get safely out of this pickle, old fellow," he would say, severely, "take my advice, and think twice before you do such a crazy thing again. Hungry and kept awake all night as I expect to be, the prospect is pretty tough. I'd like to ask Oscar to just give me one good rousing kick, that's what."

After a while he began to realize that there were suspicious movements below. He understood that certain unseen animals must be prowling around, and doubtless looking hungrily up into the tree, having scented the choice morsel that clung there among the leafy branches.

This was bad enough, but the situation grew a dozen times more serious when Ballyhoo heard that terrible roar once more make the very air quiver. A lion was close by, and he suspected that his presence must be known.

A little later on and the awful sound broke out again, this time almost under his haven of refuge. The boy, looking down presently, discovered two luminous spots in the inky gloom. These his horrified senses told him could be none other than the glowing orbs of a great lion.

Ballyhoo continued to sit there, for there was really nothing else he could do. Now the guard had been increased, for he discovered a second double luminous glow down below. The lion's mate must have been called to the spot, and the monster beasts were patrolling the ground, waiting for their supper.

How the boy suffered as the minutes dragged slowly along doubtless will never be tully known. He must have shivered many times, not alone with the increasing chill of the night, either, for the prospect was anything but comforting.

All at once he remembered that at least he had his gun. When the moon later on managed to come above the horizon, why should he not make use of the weapon?

Ballyhoo debated this with himself. He doubted his ability to kill a lion when given such deceptive light; and should he only succeed in wounding the terrible beast, who could say what might follow?

Accordingly, he made up his mind to let well

enough alone. He certainly had quite enough troubles as it was without starting anything new. And if he could manage somehow or other to just hold on until morning came, why of course his four-footed guards were bound to trot off to their den, and leave him free to go where he pleased.

To pass the time away Ballyhoo tried to figure out just how he should head if given a chance to walk off after sunrise came. He decided that he must be somewhere to the southwest of the camp, judging from the course he took when starting forth. Therefore, he should head into the northeast in order to get back to the land of "good feeds and steady habits."

Finally the moon peeped up, only a mere half of her former round disc being left, and altogether looking very much the worse for wear; but Ballyhoo greeted her coming as he might that of an old and valued friend.

It would not be quite so lonely there in the tree, now, since the darkness was going to be partially lifted. So he began to feel somewhat better, though still shivering at times.

Once the boy dozed off, despite his uncomfortable position. He awoke with a start, and immediately experienced a strange feeling that something unusual was brooding. Looking down, he could see a huge dim form moving which he knew to be that of one of the lions. Then a slight quivering movement of the tree gave poor Ballyhoo a shock, for he instantly conceived the idea that some wild animal had succeeded in climbing

amidst the lower branches, and was even then slowly but successfully approaching him.

Yes, now he could just begin to make out the dim form among the shadows, and he also saw the gleaming eyes. The first inspiration that came to Ballyhoo was to use his rifle. Then the horror of facing a wounded beast up there in the tree, with one or more lions waiting below, sent a shudder through his whole frame.

There was one other alternative. Ballyhoo had figured that out before, and kept it in mind as a desperate reserve. The cavity in the tree might be used as a refuge where he could conceal himself, and be beyond the reach of sharp claws.

He immediately commenced to unfasten himself. Unable to untie the knots in the cord, he whipped out his hunting knife and cut them, regardless of what became of the twine.

That awful form was advancing, for he could see the yellow eyes closer now. It did not matter to Ballyhoo whether the beast proved to be the more agile lioness that had somehow managed to leap up into the lower branches of the tree, or some other wild animal of the cat order. He knew that a terrible peril menaced him, which could only be avoided by prompt action on his part.

Accordingly he commenced to push feet foremost into the hole, all the while trying to keep his eyes fixed on the climbing beast, and with his gun held in such fashion that it could be used in a sudden emergency.

He had managed to get pretty well inside the hollow tree when something on which he rested one foot gave way under his weight. Ballyhoo tried in vain to keep from losing his grip, and the next thing he knew he landed down on the bottom of the cavity, which must have been several yards below the opening.

He made the best of a bad bargain. What he feared most of all was that the beast might try to drop down after him. This, however, did not come about, though many times he believed he could hear suspicious sniffing sounds above, when the chorus outside had been temporarily stilled by one of those thrilling roars.

During the balance of the night Ballyhoo crouched there in the blackness of that tree interior and fought with hordes of vicious ants that kept biting him all over. Never would he forget the misery he endured on that occasion.

Finally, exhausted and faint, he had fallen asleep, being utterly worn out by his long vigil, and all the happenings that had come to him. Awakened by the shout of Oscar, he had only too joyfully made answer. And so after considerable of an effort the newcomers managed to effect his rescue.

Ballyhoo was a fearful sight, for the ants had bitten him in so many places his face and hands were swollen up, and his eyes partly closed. But he was so glad to see his chums again that he fairly wept, and neither of them had the heart to laugh or chide him. Evidently Ballyhoo had paid

the full price of his rashness, and would never be caught so easily again.

The boys had thought to fetch some food along, and this they gave to the rescued one. His story would keep until a more convenient season. Just then it was most important that Ballyhoo be hurried back to camp as quickly as possible, because those swellings told that the ants had poisoned him fearfully, and Oscar knew that an antidote must be used without any unnecessary delay, or evil consequences might follow.

Fortunately nothing serious did come of Ballyhoo's strange adventure. By the following morning he was feeling somewhat like himself, only still very tired. Later on he told them of his experiences, which seemed to have made a very powerful impression on his mind.

"Oh! I've learned my little lesson this time good enough, I want you to know, fellows," he told them candidly. "And I guess I came out of the scrape a whole lot better than I deserved. I may make other foolish blunders from time to time, but never the same one twice. Catch me starting out alone again, and you can use my head for a football. And, besides, I'll always see to it that I've got plenty of matches in my pockets, likewise a good-sized hunk of that pemmican we fetched along to see how it tasted in an emergency. Once caught, twice shy with me. And, yes, I'm even glad now it happened, because it taught me a lesson better than any words could have done."

CHAPTER XIII

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

AFTER that days passed, and Jack was nearing the point where he might feel that he had reached the finish of that episode in his great work of securing novel pictures in the heart of Darkest Africa. He had not found anything new and weird for quite some little time, and it appeared as though they had about exhausted the wonderful resources of that famous resort for wild animals.

True, he spent hours each day ensconced there in the leafy shelter, and suffered much from the heat, but only to see repetitions of scenes which he had already captured under even more exciting conditions.

Altogether, even though he failed to add another film to those which had already been through the mill, Jack believed he had secured the most interesting and instructive series of pictures ever obtained of African forest and jungle denizens as they acted when at home in their native haunts. Each was a gem in its way, and calculated to fascinate an audience, when run upon the screen.

One day Ballyhoo Jones went with Oscar to spend a couple of hours in the tree observatory. Jack, wishing to do a little necessary repair work upon the second camera, Oscar suggested that he try his hand at cranking, if it happened that any worthy subject came along.

Tiring of sitting there at length, with nothing unusual cropping up to hold their attention, Ballyhoo had finally started to mount still higher in the big tree. Presently Oscar heard him speaking cautiously.

"What d'ye know about that, now, Oscar?" he was saying; "here's another snug little place all fixed up for a nest, with a clear view of the pool, too. I guess now some hunter of big game used to lie up here, and pick off his tuskers while they were throwing the water about, and enjoying themselves to beat the band."

"I don't know about that, though," Oscar told him, having about concluded that further caution was unnecessary for that day, since nothing seemed about to materialize. "The headman assured us that so far as he knew no shooting had ever been done here at this pool up to now. And we haven't seen any stack of dry bones about, such as would have been the case if they'd been."

Shortly afterwards Ballyhoo Jones rejoined his comrade.

"See here what I found up there, Oscar!" he remarked, holding an object up.

"I declare, that's a knife, and terribly rusty, too," the other went on to say.

"It was sticking in a limb overhead," explained the finder, "and must have been forgotten by the party who owned it."

Oscar took the knife to scrutinize it closer.

"It's certainly been there for a long time," he asserted, "judging from the look of the rust that covers the blade. Yes, several seasons of rain must have passed since this knife was bright and clean. In places the rust has eaten away into the steel, you can see."

"That's a fact," admitted the other.

"Well, I'm ready to call it off for today, and go back to camp, Ballyhoo, so please throw that old blade to the ground, and help me lower the box and the tripod."

"Huh! I guess Jack's got about all the stunning pictures he can expect from this old spot," suggested the other, as they were once more making their way across the half mile of territory, Ballyhoo carrying his rifle ready for business, for ever since his latest adventure he had shown increased vigilance when abroad.

"He's certainly fixed some dandy ones," Oscar confessed, "and there's only one I'm really sorry we missed."

The look he threw toward Ballyhoo when making this remark caused the other to grin.

"Oh! I can guess what you mean when you say that, Oscar!" he exclaimed. "You'd like the best kind to show how a poor silly looks after he's been fighting a mess of these man-killing black soldier ants that have got nippers able to take a piece

right out of you when they bite, and inject poison in the wound at the same time. Well, I'm glad you didn't have the chance, that's all. I feel silly enough as it is, without forever being reminded of that affair by seeing myself as I appeared when I got out of that hollow tree."

"Oh! for that matter," Oscar told him coolly, "your own mother wouldn't have recognized you then, you were so swollen up with pride."

As Ballyhoo had so kindly carried the weighty camera all the way to the tree observatory, Oscar would not allow him to touch it on the return trip.

"Speaking of getting away from here," he was saying as they approached the camp, "Jack and I were talking it over last night after you crawled under your blanket, and we decided that it would be just as well to make a move pretty soon."

"In which direction, Oscar?" asked Ballyhoo, with more or less curiosity, and only hoping that still other and even more novel scenes might be awaiting their coming, no matter where they roved.

"We're still undecided about that," he was told. "Another talk will settle the matter. There are three things that we can try out, and two of them seem to hold about the same pull with us just now. It may even come to flipping up a coin to decide the matter in the end."

When Jack saw them come in he called out:

"Anything doing today, fellows? Perhaps because I wasn't along you struck it rich. And, if so, how did the camera work, Oscar?"

"Oh! we didn't turn the crank once," Ballyhoo informed him. "Course there were the usual bunch of beasts around the pond, but even the bully old crocodile didn't seem to feel rambunctious today, like he was the time he had that scrap with the buffalo, and came near drowning the old bull by dragging him into the water."

"Well, that seems to settle it for us, then, eh, Oscar?" continued Jack, who evidently must have been cogitating over matters while left in camp doing his mending. "We've just got to get out, so as to hustle for new fields and startling pictures."

"By the way," said Ballyhoo, indifferently, "we did learn one new thing today, Jack. You see, somehow none of us have ever bothered climbing any higher in that same tree. I took a notion to amuse myself, after it looked bad for getting a picture, and what d'ye think I found?"

"Not another hollow, and the den of some wild beast, Ballyhoo, I hope?" said the other.

"If we'd only climbed a little higher when first we came here," continued the other, grinning amiably, however, at the allusion, "we might have saved ourselves quite a little work making a sort of platform for standing the legs of the tripod on, as well as picking away the small branches so as to leave an opening toward the pool; because as sure as anything some one has been and fixed such a stand up there long ago. The only queer thing about it all to me is that none of us detected signs of it before."

Jack started, and looked queerly at the speaker.

"What's that you're saying, Ballyhoo?" he demanded, sharply, a husky note in his voice. "Some one been in that tree before us? And there was another observation post up higher, was there?"

"Yep. And I bet you the man,—big game hunter, I still think he must have been, although Oscar here says not—was just hopping mad when after he'd gone far along on the back trail he found he'd left his hunting knife sticking in a branch overhead."

With that he held the object up for Jack's observation. Oscar saw the other look very serious, as his eyes were riveted on the old knife.

"Please let me see that," said Jack, stretching out his hand.

And Oscar, noticing how he was trembling, began to entertain sudden suspicions that up to that moment had not flashed into his brain.

"Why, certainly, Jack," Ballyhoo hastened to say as he handed the trophy over, to see the other start off with it toward the tent. "Hey! what are you intending to do with that thing?"

"Just clean it off a little!" called the other, over his shoulder.

Oscar set the camera down in a safe place and then turned his attention to something else, Ballyhoo had also apparently forgotten all about the circumstance, for he was already over near where Bingo had commenced operations looking to getting supper started.

A short time elapsed, during which perhaps Jack was busy rubbing up the strange knife which had been sticking in that branch of the tree several years. Then all at once Jack came hurrying forth from the shelter of the tent. Oscar saw that he seemed to be greatly excited, and he waited for the other to join him, which Jack immediately proceeded to do, Ballyhoo Jones came running over, having also noticed how the second chum was aroused.

"What have you discovered, Jack?" called the latter as he came up.

"A strange thing has happened, that's all," returned Jack, in trembling tones. "This knife which you found in that tree used to belong to my own father!"

"Gee whiz! you must be dreaming, Jack!" protested Ballyhoo, but Oscar only asked:

"How did you find that out, Jack, old fellow?"

"Look here, and you will soon see!" cried the other, tears running down his face, for he was laboring under heavy emotion. "There are three initials cut in the handle of the knife, and as plain as anything can be they are the letters 'J. B. A.' My father's full name was John Bailey Anderson. Besides, I can remember this knife, though he hadn't cut those initials there when last I saw it. Oh! Oscar, just to think that all these days and weeks I've been sitting up in that tree for hours and hours I never dreamed that he had been there too, taking some of the very same kind of pictures I've got! It overpowers me, that's all!"

He soon recovered his customary nerve, and could talk of the subject more calmly.

"It seems almost as though there might be some fatality about it all," he went on to say later on. "To think of our selecting this pool of all that can be found in wild animal land, and that my dear father used to sit day after day in the same tree, watching, and cranking even as I have done. If I had only suspected it before, it would have been something of a comfort to me while I waited for things to turn up."

Oscar knew what this must mean to his chum. Jack had long been hugging to his heart a wild hope that once in Africa, he might be fortunate enough to learn something definite concerning the fate of his father.

"Listen, Jack, and you too Ballyhoo," Oscar went on to say, soberly. "Now that we've learned that Mr. Anderson was right here in this same region, it would be too bad not to try and learn of his fate. Jack, suppose we enlist the headman in the game. He could let his men know that a liberal reward would be paid to the one who managed to fetch in any information concerning the fate of the man who came here three years ago, also with a little magic box like ours. Perhaps they might get in touch with some of the native tribes around here, and learn the facts, with that camera to serve as the leading clue. How about that, both of you?"

CHAPTER XIV

WONDERFUL NEWS

JACK was almost overpowered by the mere thought that Oscar's suggestion brought to his mind. No doubt he saw again the loving mother so far away, and who had been in a measure reconciled to his taking this long and hazardous journey only by the vague hope that in some wonderful way he might learn something about the fate of the dear one who had gone forth and never returned.

"Oh! thank you a thousand times for saying that, Oscar!" he cried, wringing the other's hand earnestly, and then in his excess of emotion performing the same ceremony with Ballyhoo Jones, who stood it for a time and then burst forth with:

"Here, what do you think you've got hold of, Jack? That's no pump-handle, if you do make out to be the honest milkman at five o'clock in the morning. But, joking aside, Jack, old chum, I want to tell you I'm tickled half to death over being the one to fetch you this light in the darkness, this little clue found sticking in the branches of a tree. And, believe me, whatever you fellows think the right course for us to pursue I'll be only too glad to make it unanimous."

"We'll have a talk with Marjuba tonight, then," said Oscar, "and make up a prize that will surely tempt some of these lazy black boys to go out in a bunch, and try to get in touch with their kind."

"Some of them came originally from this part of the country, you know, boys," Jack went on to say. "In consequence, they ought to be able to make the peace sign if they run across a batch of warriors with their hide shields and bone-tipped spears."

"There may something come out of it yet, so let's hope for the best," Oscar continued, and then throwing an arm across Jack's shoulders, he added: "But don't let yourself indulge in any dreams that couldn't be fulfilled, Jack. He surely must be dead, for all this time wouldn't have elapsed without you getting some sort of word."

Jack heaved a sigh. It was plain to be seen that already he had been allowing a wild hope to spring up in his heart, founded simply on this interesting fact of having found his father's knife after three years had passed.

So after supper was over the headman was called for a conference. He was evidently surprised at what he heard, and to learn that Jack's father had come to this region long ago, also carrying one of those wonderful shining little boxes of ebony and brass, filled with all manner of astonishing contrivances that represented the power of a god.

He understood what was wanted of him, and

promised to set the case before his black boys in such a fascinating fashion that many of them would wish to try to win the prize.

Of course, now that this had come up, they might linger longer in that neighborhood, especially since there was really no especial need of any hurry. Jack showed a most natural eagerness to go over again to the tree in the morning after breakfast, so as to spend some time examining that other station higher up in the dense foliage.

How it must have thrilled the poor boy's heart to realize that just a certain length of time back the father whom he had loved so much had crouched there right on that spot, and cranked his machine with avidity as he watched some especially interesting phase of wild animal life developing before his vision.

Every time he had a chance of looking at the results of his labor, Jack was sure to think of the one who had gone from his life forever. At least it was worth something just to know that a strange fortune had led him over the same trail which his father had followed.

As the time passed the blacks went forth in the effort to earn the reward promised to the one who could discover some trace of the missing photographer. They had been spurred on by the ambitious headman, anxious to make himself still more solid with the three young "bwanas," whose enterprise had by now quite won his sincere admiration.

One or two vague reports came in. They were not of a nature to arouse much hope of any success following, and poor Jack began to really despair of ascertaining the real facts.

Bingo had led one of the last parties that sallied forth. He had watched that sad, strained expression on the face of the young white master, and seemed to feel that it was up to him to get busy and have a try while there still remained time.

Somehow Oscar found himself laying unusual stress upon the possibility of the tall and faithful gun-bearer being able to accomplish something where all others had failed. He could not have explained it if he had been asked, but something forced him to entertain this hope.

Bingo had been away three days now, and the headman was showing some uneasiness in connection with the delay of the little party in returning.

"Marjuba says he is beginning to be afraid something bad has happened to that jolly dog of a Bingo," remarked Ballyhoo Jones to Oscar, when sure that the third member of the trio was busily engaged with his cameras thirty feet distant, and so preoccupied with his thoughts and anxieties that there was little danger of his noticing that they were conferring.

"Well, he said as much to me a while back," Oscar replied, "and I warned him not to repeat his croak to Jack. The poor fellow feels bad enough as it is without being compelled to take on fresh trouble. I don't believe in crossing bridges before you get to them. Time enough to

wrestle with a situation when it breaks. All the same don't misunderstand me, and think I don't believe in preparedness, for I do from my sole up to the top of my head. What I'm preaching against is unnecessary worrying when anything like this happens and cannot be helped."

It was perhaps just about half an hour later that Oscar, being in the tent busy with a notebook in which he was putting something down which he wished to remember, heard a singular sound outside. He raised his head to listen. It came from some little distance away, and at first he thought it might be a hyena giving tongue, a most unusual thing to happen in broad daylight.

When it was repeated several times, each time growing louder, Oscar changed his mind at once.

"That's a queer call uttered by some of our blacks," he told himself. "It seems to come from some ways off, and that would mean they are approaching camp. As there is only one party out at present, it must be Bingo and his crowd coming back."

Somehow it thrilled him to think that the returning expedition might be bringing news, good or bad, with them. That odd series of sounds stood for something unusual.

No sooner had Oscar managed to crawl out of the tent than he saw that a party of negroes, with spears and rhinoceros-hide shields gaily deco-

rated, was approaching. Just as he anticipated, Bingo was at their head. One man was being assisted, which made it appear as though they had met with some sort of encounter, perhaps engaged in a battle royal, either with hostile savages, or else a man-killing lion.

Jack was already hurrying forward at the side of the headman. Bingo advanced to meet them. Oscar tried to fathom the nature of the news from the manner of the black delegation. He soon came to the conclusion that the returning searchers seemed to be acting under a certain highly pitched degree of excitement.

"They think they've found something worth while," Oscar was telling Ballyhoo Jones, who by this time had joined forces with him, the pair watching Jack and the others, hoping for the best.

They saw him talking eagerly with Bingo. The headman also asked numerous quick questions, to which Bingo replied with much gesturing and extravagant motions. A few minutes afterwards Jack came running toward his chums, his face white as chalk.

"What is it, Jack?" demanded Ballyhoo Jones, with the air of one who thinks he has a right to know.

"Oh! great news, wonderful news!" cried Jack, in suspiciously vibrating tones. "It sounds too good to ever be true. Listen, both of you, and tell me if I am awake or just dreaming. Bingo

says there is a white man held a close prisoner in the main village of the Monumwezi, who has been there three full years, and that he has a shining devil box just like the ones we carry. Do you hear that, boys?"

CHAPTER XV

COMRADES ALL

"PLEASE say that all over again, Jack," pleaded Ballyhoo, looking almost bewildered, as though he feared he must be dreaming.

"Bingo has discovered a prisoner in a big village, who has been there for three years," repeated the almost breathless Jack, his eyes shining with eagerness and rekindled hope. "More than that, mind you, he has a camera with him, one that looks enough like my magic boxes to be a mate! Oh! don't you see what that means to me, Ballyhoo?"

"I certainly do now, Jack, old fellow," replied the other, looking happy himself. "Wouldn't that be the greatest thing that ever could happen if you actually did find your father alive, after all?"

"My mother!" gasped Jack, whose one thought in that crisis of his young life must be the welfare of the parent he had left behind him.

"Yes, and I wonder," mused Oscar as a thought struck him, "if she could have hoped for something like this deep down in her heart when she gave her consent to let you come with us, Jack?"

"I don't know," his chum replied, in broken tones, for he was quivering with the strong emotion that had gripped him. "Many times I've suspected that she just couldn't give him up, and was still picturing him alive, and coming home some day."

"Bingo is absolutely sure about all this, is he?" asked Ballyhoo, a trifle suspiciously, for he did not altogether trust the blacks, who were like children when it came to letting conditions sway them.

"Yes, I asked him not to deceive me on his life," replied Jack.

"Well, this bids fair to alter some of our plans, then," remarked Oscar, seriously.

Jack turned toward him instantly. His face had an appealing, almost pitiful look on it as he hastened to say:

"Oh! I do hope both of you will stand by me in this emergency, because after making this important discovery even my wonderful camera outfit must play second fiddle to me. I couldn't dream of quitting this country without learning the truth about that white prisoner in Lonabolo's chief village."

"Seems to me I've heard that queer name mentioned before," suggested Ballyhoo. "Isn't he said to be the most war-like chieftain among all the savage African tribes in this part of the country?"

"Yes," Oscar answered him, "and it's partly because of his sway over this whole region, I un-

derstand, that has kept those big game hunters from coming here when they pushed into the interior. I knew this before, so did Jack, but we agreed to take the chances. Now I can give a guess why he was to set upon striking in this particular quarter."

"I admit it, Oscar!" Jack exclaimed. "Yes, it was partly in the secret hope of learning something definite about the mysterious fate of my father. And now that this climax has come up, are you going to stand back of me, both of you?"

"I'd get mad at you for asking such a silly question, Jack," hastily cried Ballyhoo, reproachfully, "only that I understand how you can hardly be yourself just now. As to sticking to you through thick and thin, well, just show me the way I can be of help, and count the job done, that's all. Both of us'd go through fire and water for our chum, and you know it too."

"My sentiments exactly," added Oscar, with a smile.

Of course Jack seized upon their hands and squeezed them passionately. If there were tears in the poor fellow's eyes, the others could easily excuse the weakness, for they knew what the tremendous emotion must be under which he labored.

"Oh! I never can thank you enough, boys!" he stammered.

"Then quit trying," said Ballyhoo, instantly. "Seems to me that we ought to get right down

to hard pan as soon as we are able, and figure out the campaign ahead of us. For if we mean to beard the lion in his den, or old Lonabolo in his native kraal, with half a thousand savage warriors around him, we've got to get busy."

"That's a sensible line of talk you're putting up, Ballyhoo," assented Oscar, who was secretly delighted to find the other so ready to back Jack up.

"What shall we do first of all?" asked Jack, who had been so much upset by this astounding news that for once he felt as though he must depend wholly on these stanch chums to do most of the planning.

"We want to have a good long talk with Bingo before we decide on our programme," Oscar went on to explain. "Something he may say or describe is apt to give us a hint that will affect our plans."

"Suppose we get him over here with the three of us," suggested Ballyhoo, who didn't relish being left out of anything of that looked like excitement.

"Wait till he's had something to eat," Oscar continued. "They've made a long lay of it, I think. It's been five days now since they started forth, so I imagine this village must be quite some journey from here."

"He said it was about two suns off," reported Jack.

So they continued to talk it all over while supper was being prepared. Ballyhoo himself had

looked after the cooking part during the absence of Bingo, whom they had groomed to act as *chef*, with fair results.

Later on, as Jack was getting very impatient to proceed, and the gun-bearer had also partaken of a bountiful meal after the fashion of his kind, Ballyhoo went to summon the native to the council.

Now, while Bingo's vocabulary of working English was limited, he had a faculty for understanding about all that was said to him, and could answer in various ways. These ranged from a nod, or a shake of the head, to drawing rude designs on the earth; for all savages seem to incline toward this habit of communicating by picture writing, just as the Indians in our own country did in days of old, as well as at the present time.

It would be difficult to cover the tedious ground they went over in getting Bingo to give up what information he had acquired. Oscar was quite clever about doing this, and Ballyhoo from time to time broke in with a question or so.

In the end they managed to get it all squeezed out—how Bingo and his comrades had made straight for the forks of the river where they knew the extensive kraal, as well as the chief palace of Lonabolo lay; how they had crept up in the night and spied on the armed camp, discovering that a white man was kept a prisoner among the conical-roofed lodges, and that he too carried around with him from time to time a wonderful

little shining box, doubtless the particular home of the god that gave him power.

Of course nothing could be gleaned concerning the multitude of perils that were likely to be encountered on the way, or after they had arrived. All such things the boys discounted, because they took it for granted that they must look upon the warlike Monumwezi as bitter enemies to the whites, and hence never dream of putting themselves in the way of capture, lest they simply share the fate of the other poor prisoner.

When finally Bingo was allowed to go back to his fellows the three Camera Boys felt that they had learned enough to start building their structure. They could now begin to lay their plans, and first of all was the breaking of camp.

"Ought we take the whole expedition with us, Oscar?" asked Ballyhoo.

"I don't see where that would profit us," interjected Jack.

"No more it would," Oscar went on to say in that decisive way of his. "All told, we number just forty souls, and many among our camp followers wouldn't amount to much in case we had to fight for our lives. Then, again, what would that number amount to when you say this savage chief, Lonabolo, has at least five hundred armed warriors around him at all times?"

"Then we ought to pick out the most reliable of the bunch, and let the rest wait for us at some agreed on place, eh, Oscar?" continued the Jones boy.

"My plan would be about what you say," Oscar told him. "A dozen good husky black boys, the most pugnacious Marjuba can select, knowing them all as he does, would be ample to serve our purpose."

"The smaller the party, up to a certain number, the better, of course," Jack admitted, more to have a voice in the matter than because of any other reason, for he was only too willing to be guided wholly by what his dependable chums thought.

"If the village is two days' tramp off," continued Oscar, speaking as though he had made up his mind, "we could leave the headman with the main body at some point, where on our return we would expect to rejoin them. Bingo of course we want with us, for a good many reasons."

"Yes, that's so," concluded Ballyhoo; "for if on that other occasion he managed to get inside the stockade they say all these villages have around them, I guess now he might do it again. Bingo came from around here, he told me, though he was only a small boy when his father emigrated to near the coast. In fact, the family was captured during a raid by another tribe at war with the Monumwezi. So he can still talk in their tongue, he says."

"If anything should happen to us," continued Jack, seriously, "we must leave a letter with the headman to be carried to the shore by him, and handed to that British officer we met there, who could send it to our homes."

"Oh! come now!" cried Ballyhoo Jones, "don't let yourself dream that anything is going to happen to upset all our plans. The Camera Boys have got in the habit of carrying out about everything they attempt; and confidence is always one-half of the battle, isn't that so, Oscar?"

"We mean to go to the limit, and try our level best to succeed in our plan," replied the other, more modestly; "and that's all I can say about it."

All that evening they continued to exchange ideas. In this way a number of suggestions were adopted that promised to be of considerable help in the general carrying out of the big scheme. None of them deceived themselves and attempted to make it appear as though they had an easy prospect ahead. They knew only too well that difficulties would stand up before them like mountains, and success could only be achieved through concerted effort, shrewd judgment, and unfailing pertinacity.

Orders were given for an early move in the morning, and what could be done in the way of packing was commenced before they lay down.

The blacks did not know just what was in the wind, but the headman had been taken into the confidence of the young "bwanas," and agreed to pick out a dozen of his sable followers whom he could strongly recommend as "fighting men," dependable in case of a battle, even with the dreaded warriors of Lonabolo.

That must have been a terribly long night for

Jack. Doubtless sleep refused to visit his eyes until long into the small hours of the morning. This wonderful news brought into camp by Bingo had thrilled him to the core, and as he lay there under the friendly shelter of the khaki-colored tent he must have let his thoughts travel back many times to the little home, where "mother" was sitting sewing of an evening, her mind centred on the dearly beloved boy who had gone so far away from her, partly with a vague hope that neither of them really expected could ever be fulfilled. Then he would doubtless try to picture the delirious delight of that same mother if he could only bring back the long missing one. Under such conditions it was not at all strange that Jack slept but little.

They were all up long before dawn broke. Much had to be done in the way of packing, so that an early start could be effected.

While they ate breakfast darkness still lay around them, though far off in the East there were signs looking to the coming of the day.

"It's going to be the regular scorcher, I'm afraid," ventured Ballyhoo, who of course felt the heat more than either of his chums, on account of his dallying with the fire while assisting Bingo get breakfast.

"We've got to look for that right along," said Oscar, "because we're not so far below equatorial Africa. It's never decently cool in here. The vegetation is along the sub-tropical, you can see. I expect that we ought to call ourselves lucky if

we miss a terrible storm, such as they sometimes have here."

Oscar, it was plain to be seen, was built along the lines of a natural optimist. No matter how bad things came about, he could always see how they might easily have been considerably worse; and that hence there was reason for being thankful.

Finally, when every duty had been faithfully carried out, and the safari was in a condition to march, the sun was just peeping in sight through the openings in the forest. Each burden-bearer had his pack on his head, or back, as he chose, and the long line formed behind the headman, ready to take the trail.

They expected to return over the same course they had taken in coming, up to a certain point, where Bingo would decide that the separation should occur, one party lying secreted in the dense brush, and the smaller section heading direct for the big Monamwezi kraal at the junction of the rivers.

All of the boys looked back a little wistfully as the start was made. They had spent some pretty happy days there in that camp, taking it in all, and never could any of them forget the wonderful things their eyes had beheld in that country of the big game.

The only thing that gave Oscar cause for wonder, when he came to think it over, was the fact that during all their stay they had never seen a hostile black. It must be that the warriors of

Lonabolo did not start forth on hunting trips save at certain set periods of the year; and that at all other times they stayed by their village, given over to various drillings and manœuvres calculated to impress other tribes with an overpowering sense of their superiority, and help keep them in a condition of subjection, paying annual tribute to the great black chief.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LION DANCE

It was not until about the middle of that hot afternoon that Bingo indicated by signs to Oscar that the time had come when the party must divide. They had gone as far along the back trail as was advisable. Here the headman and the main body could wait for them, keeping a vigilant lookout from the top of a convenient kopje near at hand, so as to know if an attack were imminent, when they could flee.

So they separated. The headman was a shrewd fellow, with a wrinkled face and keen eyes. He knew what it meant to him should the young "bwanas" succeed in their new undertaking, and hence he was willing to do all in his power to render them assistance.

Before halting for the night the smaller expedition covered several miles. This would help them considerably, because the next day's journey promised to be a trying one.

As one of the blacks carried a camera, and another the tripod, as well as various other adjuncts

to picture taking, it could be seen that the boys did not intend to let any opportunity for securing notable things get past them. If it happened that they could secure a long-distance view, aided by the telephoto lens of the famous Monumwezi kraal it would be something worth while, and of which they might well feel justly proud in future days.

It was Oscar who had suggested this, and Ballyhoo seconding the motion, of course Jack expressed himself as agreeable. Just then, however, he himself had little heart for thinking of picture-taking. If only he could find that it was his own dear father who was King Lonabolo's prisoner, and manage by some crafty move to effect his rescue, Jack would not care one whit if he never saw a camera again.

They built their cooking fire with great care that night, not that there was much danger of the natives discovering their presence, but simply on general principles. Since they were now embarked on a mission that might come under the head of a war game, it seemed eminently fitting that they apply all known methods of guarding against surprise.

The blacks knew by now what was ahead of them, so that they no longer manifested a disposition to laugh and sing while resting in camp. Instead every man among them went about his duties with a seriousness that pleased Oscar. They had heard much about this same cruel black ruler, Lonabolo, whose name had long been

associated with many raids and native wars. On this account they laid most of their confidence on the invincible prowess of the whites, armed as they were with guns that "talked many times," and also guarded with the "little god in the box."

A hole was dug in the ground, and in this Ballyhoo made his fire, where he cooked some supper for himself and two companions. The blacks had a supply of cooked meat in their packs. Ballyhoo had also secured all the pemmican, or dried meat, which they had laid in as a sort of emergency ration. Thus altogether they could get on in case of necessity for several days without building a fire.

Nothing happened during that night, except that as the boys had grown accustomed to such a dreadful racket from the time the sun went down until dawn broke again, they hardly knew what to make of its almost utter absence now.

Then came another day. Jack greeted its coming with a secret prayer that before he tried to sleep again he might know the truth, no matter whether it was fated to be a bitter disappointment or not.

Early they were on their way. Jack showed astonishing vigor, but that was easily understood by his two chums, who knew what manner of alluring song hope was singing in his heart.

Bingo led the way. His black face told of the

great pride he felt in being given such a responsible position by the young white "bwanas." Nevertheless Oscar as well as Ballyhoo Jones continued to keep a vigilant outlook as they went on, not knowing when some sudden danger might menace them.

At noon they had made good progress, and from what Bingo told them must be well on the way to the river village.

Here was where the knowledge possessed by their black guide served them well, for otherwise they would have perhaps taken the wrong course, and made a sorry mess of it, ending in discovery, with possible capture.

"Bingo has told me," Ballyhoo was saying as the journey was continued after a brief halt in the hottest hour of the day, where a water-hole offered them a refreshing drink, as well as a chance to refill their canteens, "that he will lead us to a low kopje crowned with thorn trees, where we can hide, and see the whole of the village spread out in the near distance."

"He told me the same thing," added Oscar, "and something more besides. It seems that this same kopje is a place with an evil name. According to the old fakir of a witch doctor or medicine man, the Bad Spirit that he has to chase away from those that are sick had his abode on that same low hill. So never a one of the blacks of the village ever dares go there, day or night. And what finer refuge could we ask than some such place as that?"

"But how does Bingo dare take the risk, then?" demanded Ballyhoo.

"Oh! Bingo has been among the white men so long," explained Oscar, obligingly, "that he shares their contempt for all such silly stuff as that. When *he* gets a pain in his 'tummy' he doesn't believe in having a hideous witch doctor all dressed up in his wonderful finery dance around him, pound him on the back with his club, and actually scare the pain away. Not a bit of it, for Bingo knows that we carry some wonderful little remedies, like camphor and the like, one taste of which will chase the pain away. So he scorns to put himself in the same class with those ignorant Monumwezi warriors who believe all their medicine man tells them about his wonderful charm."

"Just as I've always said!" exclaimed Ballyhoo, in exultation, "everything seems to work for the Camera Boys, once they get started. Why, what could be finer than having that haunted spot come along, where we can find refuge, and none of the black warriors dare intrude? Why, if it was made for us to order it couldn't be any nicer."

The afternoon was wearing away, and all of them began to grow anxious to hear from Bingo that they must be approaching their destination. Often when the breeze sprung up a bit the black could be seen to listen intently. Then at one time he turned and made a certain gesture toward Oscar, who was watching him.

"I heard it plainly, too!" said Ballyhoo Jones,

excitedly. "It was a shout something like our men used to make when they were trying out one of their native dances. We must be getting pretty close to that village, seems like, boys."

"No doubt of it," added Oscar, "and hearing that yell tells us Bingo was right when he said some sort of ceremonial business was being carried on these days in the big kraal. Every season they have certain wonderful savage affairs that collect the people for many miles around, and keep them strong in the belief that the Monumwezi still remain the dominant tribe of the region, and that Lonabolo is the wisest of all native chieftains."

"Whee! perhaps, who knows, we may even get a glimpse of some of these queer goings-on!" exclaimed Ballyhoo. "And wouldn't it be great now if we could manage to film that Lion Dance as practiced by all these African savage tribes—it would be the real thing—no joke intended, either."

As they proceeded further the breeze favored them still more and more. Most of the time now they were listening to barbaric music from loudly beaten tomtoms, or drums, trumpets, and possibly other native instruments. Ballyhoo declared it was worse than Coney Island music, and that was bad enough. But Oscar told them they had reason to be thankful, since all this excitement was apt to keep the people of the river kraal from straying into the forest, and hence possibly dis-

covering the little expedition advancing against them.

"The excitement increases by leaps and bounds," Ballyhoo ventured to say when another half hour had fled, and they were now creeping cautiously along.

"Better drop that style of speaking from now on, Ballyhoo," advised Oscar. "When it's absolutely necessary for you to say anything whisper it. You never can tell who might be lurking around. Sometimes even the rocks and tree-trunks seem to have eyes and ears. An ounce of prevention is better than a whole pound of cure in a case like this."

"I'll remember, Oscar, and you're right about that, too," muttered the other.

Shortly afterwards Bingo pointed beyond them and nodded his woolly head. They knew he meant that the kopje was there in plain sight. It turned out to be a rocky hill of the usual flat-top variety with which they were so familiar, and crowned with a thick mass of thorn trees and brush.

It would evidently make an excellent hiding-place for them while they stayed in the vicinity, a fact Oscar noted with considerable satisfaction.

Finally they began to make their way up the elevation. It was not such an easy task as the boys may have imagined; but, persevering, they drew near the crown. Here renewed care was necessary in order that nothing be done to hazard

discovery, though possibly even if one of them were seen it would be believed by the superstitious Monumwezi that he must be the Evil Spirit taking the form of a man in order to go about his work the more effectively.

When Bingo led them to the thick fringe of bushes that marked the edge of the growth, it was found that they could obtain a wonderful view of the river village lying there, and bathed in the light of the setting sun. This chanced to be back of their location, shining full upon the stockade of posts and wattle, with the conical or oblong thatched roofs of many primitive houses lying beyond—at least they might have seemed that in the eyes of civilized men, but to the blacks of that region they undoubtedly represented the highest type of architecture known.

Only one look did the Camera Boys give at this background. Then their eyes were glued on the amazing spectacle which was taking place there on that open plain lying between the Evil Hill and the great kraal of Lonabolo, the black chieftain.

It looked like a review of all his armed forces that the king was ordering before him as he sat with his retinue of captains and chief advisors on a sort of raised dais, covered with the skins of wild beasts.

Oscar immediately glued his field-glasses to his eyes and stared. Then he passed them over to the others to busy himself in trying to get the camera fixed on its tripod. Plainly he meant to

capture that wonderful spectacle if it could be done without too much risk.

The barbaric music rose and fell, at times being almost deafening with the roar of the many drums. Line after line of stalwart warriors as black as ebony, and all carrying wicked-looking decorated spears, as well as painted shields fashioned from tough rhinoceros hide, while beautiful ostrich plumes floated from their tufted heads—these came on in what seemed to be a never-ceasing stream, scores upon scores, until Ballyhoo felt his breath taken away by the astonishing sight of so many fighting men.

Meanwhile Oscar had gotten busy. He commenced to crank his box, which was cleverly planted in such a position that its presence might not be suspected, yet at the same time nothing lay in the way of a clear view.

So they remained while the last of the black host passed in review before the powerful chief, whose waving arm could be seen keeping time with the marching of the barefooted army.

Then quickly the scene was changed. The warriors had taken their places on two sides, and out into the open came others who were dressed in the most fantastic costumes imaginable.

One had been cleverly covered with a lion's skin, and the head seemed to have been well preserved. Others armed with spears were meant to represent the hunters.

"It's going to be the Lion Dance!" whispered

Ballyhoo to Jack. "Now we'll have a chance to see what it's like when done by *real* artists in their line. And, best of all, just hear Oscar cranking away, will you, Jack?"

"Good old Oscar, he'll get it all down pat!" murmured the other, though not once did he remove his eyes from the small end of the field glasses that brought the gorgeous spectacle so close to him, and made it possible for him to watch the strong crafty face of the famous black chieftain whose name had long been a terror in this part of Africa.

They could hear the chant rising and falling. Women as well as men took part in the continual noise. A dozen were springing about as though to prove how athletic they could be if called upon to give battle to man or beast. They flourished their decorated spears in every imaginable position.

Some of these dancers were painted with white clay, and others had the most fantastic adornings possible. They were supposed to be hunting the lion, and making all sorts of fierce lunges at the dodging beast with their spears, though of course not striking him at all.

It was while Ballyhoo, having himself been more or less fascinated by all this going-on, crouched there and stared that he felt Jack nudge him excitedly:

"Oh! please take the glasses, Ballyhoo, and look again, won't you? No, not at those silly dancers,

but back of the dais where the big chief sits. There is some one standing there, and I think it must be a white man, though my eyes keep getting so dim and watery that I can't be sure. Please look and tell me what you see!"

CHAPTER XVII

CHANGING THEIR COLOR

"It is a white man, as sure as shooting!" whispered Ballyhoo, after he had managed to focus his eyes on the spot Jack mentioned. "He's wearing a beard and is dressed in a queer makeshift costume, but there's no mistaking the fact that he doesn't belong to that black gang."

Presently Jack pulled at his sleeve.

"Now let me look again, Ballyhoo, because my eyes seem clearer. Oh! I ought to be able to tell if it should be *him*! I haven't forgotten many of his gestures and way of walking. But my heart keeps on thumping so hard it almost stifles me."

"Get a better grip on yourself, Jack," said Ballyhoo, quite sensibly too.

A short time afterwards and the other lowered the glass. Upon his face shone a radiant smile that Ballyhoo would never forget.

"Then you've recognized him, have you, Jack, and is it your father?" he asked.

"Yes, there isn't the least doubt in my mind now that yonder white prisoner is my own dad!"

said the other, with a half sob that caused more from excessive joy than anything else.

"Bully say I!" Ballyhoo observed, perhaps a bit more boisterously than was exactly safe, for Oscar immediately hissed a warning, though he too felt thrilled by what Jack had just admitted.

The Lion Dance had now reached its conclusion, and the tired participants were going off the scene. Others took their places, as the programme went on. Now those who crouched and writhed and made extravagant leaps that kept time wonderfully with the barbaric music were almost entirely destitute of clothing, and their black bodies glistened in the declining sun's rays as though freshly greased.

Just what this dance might be the boys did not know at the time. Afterwards they learned that it typified War, and that those stalwart men were the picked fighters of the whole tribe, whose lodges doubtless held trophies of many a desperate deed of the chase and the warpath.

Oscar never ceased his labor at the crank. He believed that he was securing some of the most interesting pictures ever taken, and under conditions that could be described as nothing less than marvelous.

"It's all over for this afternoon!" said Ballyhoo, when there was a last wild burst of shouting and music, after which the serried ranks of the warriors were seen to break, and the units dispersed in every direction.

“Keep quiet now, everybody,” was the warning Oscar passed along. “If there’s any danger for us, it’s apt to come just while they’re scattering, and many eyes may be turned this way to see if the old Evil Spirit of the kopje has anything to say about the King’s display of force and power.”

“Huh!” grunted Ballyhoo, “if it wasn’t that we’re bent on such a serious business now, I’d be half tempted to try and give them all a scare. Bingo here could easy enough rig me out in some of that fancy stuff he fetched along, then I’d step out where they could see, and give the whole roost a shock, believe me!”

“Well, don’t think of it a second time,” advised Oscar, “because we can’t afford to take any chances. So you fully believe that was your father, do you, Jack?”

“I know it!” replied the other, positively, “and if I never saw him again, I’d always believe he still lived, and was a wretched prisoner over here.”

“One thing strikes me,” suggested Ballyhoo, guardedly, not wishing to be “called down” again for reckless talking, “they seem to be treating him halfway decent. How would you account for that, Oscar?”

“I imagine that if that is Mr. Anderson, as we now believe,” said the other, seriously, “he must have discovered some means for getting in the good graces of Lonabolo, so that while the old chief won’t hear of his departing, at the same

time he gives him certain privileges. It may be the presence of the box camera has something to do with it. Then, again, perhaps Mr. Anderson, having some common medicinal remedies along with him at the time he was taken prisoner may have been able to chase away a pain the old chief or his favorite wife had, and thus he is looked on as a sort of witch-doctor, playing second only to the big medicine man himself."

"My father did have considerable knowledge of medicine, come to think of it," added Jack. "You see, he used to be away so much by himself in all sorts of lonely countries, trying after unusual pictures, that he had to pick up some acquaintance with drugs. He may have been able to find certain herbs growing over here from which to make his remedies. Some of them come from Africa, I understand."

"Well, what's next on our programme?" Ballyhoo wanted to know.

"We couldn't think of doing anything until night comes," said Oscar.

"Unless it was fixing ourselves as we figured on doing, with the assistance of Bingo and the material he fetched along for that purpose," Jack was saying.

"That's right, too," Oscar told him, quickly. "Whatever is done in that line ought to be attended to while daylight lasts, because we wouldn't dare start any sort of fire here."

"Better be getting busy, then," grumbled Ballyhoo, "because the sun is sinking at a great rate,

and there'll be only half an hour more of daylight."

Ballyhoo was grievously disappointed because he had been chosen to stay there on the Evil Kopje with the black guard, while his two chums, decorated so as to appear to be some of the festive masquerading natives, intended invading the big kraal, and trying to get in touch with the white captive.

Retiring further back, this work was immediately commenced. Ballyhoo, at least, displayed a willingness to assist with every means in his power. He helped to blacken the bodies of his two chums with many a chuckle and grin.

"Oh! but you'll have a sweet time getting this same stuff off again," he told them as he worked. "But, then, it's all done in a good cause, and I'm sure you'll be willing to let it wear off, even if it takes months."

When the job was called complete both Jack and Oscar were certainly weird looking objects. As there still remained a little sunlight, Ballyhoo insisted on setting up the camera and cranking the same while the pair stalked to and fro, assuming such natural poses as Bingo showed them were proper for natives who had never worn shoes in their lives—and blessed little else, for that matter.

"Some time you'll be awful glad we've got such splendid pictures of how you fellows behaved yourselves, away out here in Darkest Africa," he told them when they objected to his keeping up the cranking any longer.

Then the sun dropped out of sight, and immediately it seemed as if from the deep forests and jungles, where they had lain hidden so long, troops of shadows came pouring forth, to settle with the darkness upon the earth.

The black attendants were lying upon the ground devouring supper, and as there would not be another chance to get a bite, the three lads concluded they had better imitate their example. Ballyhoo no longer sought to joke, even in whispers. A sense of the serious nature of their work was borne in upon him, now that the time of striking forth drew closer and closer.

He was to be left in charge, and with the blacks meant to stay there on the kopje of the evil name, waiting for the safe return of those who expected to venture into the compound where the houses and the king's long palace stood.

Should they come back again, it was all arranged just how they should flee. Bingo knew where native boats could be secured, and in these they would speed down the river that would take them nearest the spot where the main body of the expedition had been left.

Then at the proper time they would go ashore, leaving no trail by which their enemies might trace them, and sending the boats adrift.

Time dragged on. The racket over at the village gradually died down as midnight approached. Finally Bingo came and pulled at the arm of Oscar, though he no longer found a sleeve there at which to jerk.

"Well, we're off, Ballyhoo; wait for us here, and remember the signals," Oscar said simply.

"Good luck to you, boys!" was the other's parting remark, and then they were gone.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREAT KRAAL OF LONABOLO

WHEN they went forth, bent upon such a desperate errand, Oscar and Jack might well wonder whether these happenings were not a part of some amazing dream. Certainly neither of them two months before would have imagined for a moment that the time would come when, rigged out after the manner of the native blacks of equatorial Africa, and looking like first-class freaks, they would be advancing on a Monumwezi kraal bent upon acting the part of spies and rescuers.

They soon drew near the odd-looking stockade that was strongly built of posts and wattle, so that it could resist any ordinary attack on the part of organized spearmen.

Already the two boys had made a mental map of the place so that they would know something of their surroundings, even with only the stars to guide them. But inside the compound there were still fires burning, though these had died down considerably of late, and were possibly unattended now.

There were numerous entrances and exits to the

stockade that ran all the way around the village of Lonabolo. These were doubtless intended to be closed up hermetically in time of danger; but when the country was at peace the openings were allowed to remain unguarded.

From all that they had seen, the boys were of the impression that, flushed with a consciousness of his overwhelming power, the king did not mean to bother with unnecessary duties that would only tire his men, and cause them to believe he feared any person who walked the earth.

Bingo led the way. He knew how to flatten himself against the ground until utterly invisible; so that the boys soon found it advisable to sink their pride and copy the gun-bearer's example.

Now they were so near the stockade that they could see the tops of the wattle panels. From beyond came a murmurous sound that may have been caused by teeming insect life, or the heavy breathing of hundreds of warriors sleeping after their hard day's exercise.

The crucial test was at hand. If they were stopped while about to enter among the houses of the great kraal, all would depend on Bingo. He could perhaps placate the curious questioner by some clever excuse, possibly affirming that his two young companions were under a vow not to speak a word until they had wiped out some family disgrace by the blood of an enemy.

No such crisis came, however. Bingo glided in through the open gate, and first Oscar and then Jack followed in his wake. They breathed freer

after this had been accomplished, for it seemed as though fickle fortune might be favoring them. And naturally the heart of Jack beat high with eager anticipation.

Now it became necessary to use extraordinary care with regard to which way they moved, for it was found that several fires still burned, and around these sat a number of huge black figures with their handy spears bunched close at hand.

Evidently these were supposed to be the night guard; but such a long time had elapsed since any other tribe had dared incur the enmity of the powerful king that this duty had become something of a sinecure; and those who were nightly assigned to the task never bothered their heads about showing any real energy in the discharge of their duty.

The boys had been duly warned not to appear to be slinking along, for that was certain to attract undue attention to themselves, which was the very thing they wished to avoid. Consequently they walked as they had been drilled by their mentor, so that on meeting a woman bearing a jar of water fetched from the river she gave them but a passing glance, and continued on her way indifferently.

This was encouraging. If they could do it once, why not a second time, and continually, as long as they ran up against any inmate of the great kraal?

It was well that Bingo had a remarkable mem-

ory that served him when the need was greatest. Those numerous houses, with their conical straw-thatched roofs sharply slanting, were so much alike that it might have sorely puzzled one less keen to tell which way he wanted to go. He had only been here in Lonabolo's village once, and yet he seemed to have it all marked down in his mind; even as a gifted astronomer draws the canals of Mars and keeps track of all the changes disclosed on that planet by the succession of seasons.

Ballyhoo had wondered why, if the village were left so unguarded, the prisoner had not long ago tried to escape. Oscar had told him that in all probability the captive realized how impossible it would be for a lone man, without the proper weapons for defending himself against savage beasts to ever reach the Coast from this point so far in the remote interior; which fact would account for his giving himself up as lost to home and dear ones forever.

From the actions of Bingo they guessed that they must now be drawing near the building in which the white man dwelt. Some little peculiarity about it must have attracted Bingo's shrewd eye on that former occasion, and by means of which he now believed he could identify the hut.

Presently he was pointing, and although no word was spoken, they could easily guess what he meant to imply with that gesture. That particular house, no different from scores of others in size or structure, was the white man's prison, in

which he had made his lonely home all these dreary months upon months, always dreaming of the dear ones so many thousands of miles away, and perhaps longing for some lucky accident to send a company of white soldiers that way, to whom he might appeal.

Indeed, that must have been his only shred of hope, for he surely could not anticipate the coming of any venturesome exploring or hunting party, with the nerve to invade the village of the dreaded Lonabolo, trying to effect his rescue.

Jack was unable to do more than act like an automaton. He left all else to Oscar and the sagacious Bingo. Before long the truth would be known, and either a great joy or a bitter disappointment awaited the anxious lad.

They crouched there in the shadows waiting. Before the next step could be taken it must be made certain that no interloper hung around to spoil their plans. Oscar believed in making haste 'slowly.' And no matter how much his chum might be suffering in mind, far better this than that they act too soon and ruin all.

The kraal was quieting down as fewer inmates moved about seeking their individual quarters. Those who squatted near the declining fires seemed to be showing less disposition to talk of their mighty deeds in war and the chase. A common weakness, the natural desire for rest, was commencing to grip all alike.

"Patience, Jack!" whispered Oscar in the ear of his friend. "We must not be in too big a hurry.

Trust to Bingo; he knows what to do, and when."

So Jack, understanding how the other was sympathizing with his eagerness to discover the truth, returned the poke with his elbow, not daring to trust his voice lest it disclose a raspy tendency owing to his excitement, and possibly draw attention toward them.

It might be that the shivers that passed over Jack were not altogether caused by the state of his mind. With the coming of midnight the air had grown strangely chilly, as it generally does in equatorial countries, where the days are one long maddening heated spell. And it must be remembered that the two boys in furthering their design to look as much as possible in the semi-gloom like natives were not half clothed.

Even Oscar felt it, and had to shut his teeth tightly together to keep from trembling now and then. But, although they went on leaden wings, the minutes were passing. Bingo could not be meaning to wait much longer before giving them to understand that the time had arrived.

When finally Oscar felt the black gun-bearer move, he hoped that inaction was about to be displaced by a forward move. This proved to be the case, for a tug at his arm announced that the pilot was off.

Nearer they crept to the marked lodge. Oscar strained his eyes to discover whether he could see any sign tending to prove that it was guarded. He did not believe such a thing possible, for ap-

parently the prisoner was being treated as though he had many privileges; and the king must have long ago taken it for granted that attempting to escape had been given up as hopeless by his captive.

Of course Oscar was more than curious to know just how Bingo expected to put them in touch with the white man inside that lodge with the conical thatched roof. He anticipated that when the time came the black would turn affairs over to him, since the sound of a voice speaking English must assure the wretched man that his long looked for opportunity had come at last.

There was no longer the slightest suspicion existing in Oscar's mind with regard to Bingo having picked out the right-house. As they closed in upon it his eyes, now better accustomed to seeing in the half gloom, caught sight of a number of things that proved this beyond the shadow of a doubt.

In the first place, there was a rude chimney in connection with the lodge, showing that the man who dwelt there had made for himself some manner of small stove to add to his comfort on rainy days, or perhaps whenever he should feel sick and shivering with the fever.

Then on a bench just outside the door Oscar saw what appeared to be a gourd basin, and a receptacle like a barrel for holding water, which the women and girls doubtless carried up every day from the river; for, as in Indian villages, the weaker sex take all these burdens on their shoul-

ders among the blacks of Africa, leaving the lordly men to do the hunting, fighting and loafing.

There was possibly not another lodge in all that extensive kraal, the inmates of which were so fortified for taking a morning wash. And after seeing this indisputable evidence of a white man's occupancy, Oscar no longer allowed himself to doubt the sagacity of the guide. Bingo also had eyes, and could see these things; so that after all it was an easy guess.

By this time they were alongside the rude building that answered all the purposes of a shelter, and a home in this vast African forest. Bingo had flattened himself out so that he lay on his stomach by the wall of the structure. Undoubtedly he was now about to do something to attract the attention of the inmate.

He deliberately proceeded to give several little knocks in succession. If these failed to accomplish the object he had in view, it would be easy to add to their volume. Oscar, crouching nearby, waited to learn the result, but no answering sound reached his ears.

Again did the black use his knuckles. The tattoo was louder than before, but not to a degree to attract attention from any other quarter; for dogs were barking, and there was a certain volume of sound still arising, what with the mutter of voices, and the crying of babies in among the lodges effectually drowned out the knocking.

Then Oscar believed he felt something strike

against the wall from the other side. Bingo replied with another slow series of raps, which had hardly ceased when the boys were thrilled to hear a muffled voice within asking:

“Who is there, and what do you want?”

CHAPTER XIX

SUCCESS FOLLOWS A BOLD MOVE

THIS was Oscar's opportunity. He knew that Bingo expected him to take upon his shoulders the further responsibility of getting in communication with the prisoner of Lonabolo's village there on the river forks.

So thrusting his head as close to the wall of the lodge as he could get it, he tried to send his voice beyond, though exercising due caution.

"Listen! We are here to help you. Can you slip outside and join us?"

There was a brief pause, and one fraught with staggering consequences to the amazed man beyond that cabin wall. He must have seriously doubted whether his ears told him the truth, for years had passed since last he heard his own language used to convey ideas.

It took him some time to realize that he was awake and not dreaming. Then again Oscar heard him speaking, partly to himself it might be.

"Yes, I surely can pass out and join you! Oh! what does this mean? Am I at last going mad, as I have feared so long might happen? Is this true, or am I in the grip of the fever again?"

"It is true, sir; please do not delay, or we will lose valuable time," was what Oscar sent through the wall as his message of hope.

"I am coming immediately!" floated faintly back, showing that the captive must have already started for the exit.

Then a slight shuffling movement nearby announced his arrival. They could see his figure approaching. He half bent over, as though fearing that after all only the black shadows would mock him, as they may have done on other occasions when, awaking in the night after a vivid dream in which he thought help had arrived, he had only met with bitter disappointment.

Now he was close upon them. Bingo was the first to rise, and as if the prisoner had the eyes of an owl, he seized upon the wrist of the gun-bearer.

"Was it you called those words of cheer to me?" he hissed.

"Him, Bwánas Os," came the guarded reply from the gun-bearer.

Just then two other dusky figures seemed to rise up out of the grass. Oscar put out his hand and felt the groping fingers of the other close upon him.

"Listen, sir!" he said again, believing that the fewer words used the better for their safety, "we have come to try and effect your rescue. Are you willing to go with us to our camp?"

"Oh! a thousand times yes," he heard the man reply, huskily.

"Then don't say another word, but come with us," Oscar whispered in his ear, for the other was bending down and trying to stare into his face.

He must have greatly marveled at the fact that so far as he could ascertain, all of these intruders in the big kraal seemed to be of the one type, as black as any of Lonabolo's warriors; and yet they spoke his own tongue. Possibly something of the truth may have managed to seep into the sorely puzzled brain of the prisoner, so that he realized how men who would try to venture there among those lodges must of necessity adopt some means for disguising their real identity.

Bingo again led the way. He could be trusted to take them safely to one of the exits of the compound; and then if luck still favored them they would be over the worst part of the undertaking.

Imagine the feeling of poor Jack, condemned to utter silence, though it seemed to him his heart was pounding so that it must surely break through its prison walls. But then it was sheer gratitude that so nearly overwhelmed the boy; for brief as had been the communication with the prisoner, Jack believed with all his soul that the man they were trying to rescue was indeed his long missing father.

Of course it was manifestly impossible as well as impolitic for him to attempt such a thing as trying to disclose his identity just then. That must wait until they had placed some little dis-

tance between themselves and the hostile kraal of the African king.

Well, here was the exit close beside them. Bingo tarried, for he saw that several dusky warriors were slowly coming through, having been engaged in some duty outside the compound. Until they passed it were folly to make a move, for the presence of the bearded white prisoner would surely awaken their suspicions.

When finally the coast was again clear, progress was once more resumed, and all of them heaved sighs of relief after the barricade wall had been well left behind. There was now a clear course between them and the hill of the evil name, where Ballyhoo and the fighting men awaited their coming.

Hours might elapse before the flight of the late prisoner could be discovered. By that time they hoped to be with the rest of the expedition, and hastening toward the distant coast as fast as their safari could march.

Glad indeed were the boys when they saw the low-crowned hill, supposed to be the abode of the bad spirit, loom up before them in the darkness. Here Oscar thought to give the signal that had been agreed on with Ballyhoo. This he did in order to relieve the mind of the watcher, as well as to let the fighting men know they were friends, so that a flight of spears might not greet their coming.

And then the meeting took place. Ballyhoo's first eager question was with regard to whether

success had marked them for favorites in the venture.

"Did you get what you went after, Oscar?" he asked, softly, yet with an eagerness in his voice that spoke volumes for the mental suffering he had been enduring all the time the others were absent.

"Everything is lovely, Ballyhoo," the other assured him, "and let that be enough for just now. We still have hard work ahead of us, you know, for Bingo plans that we seize boats, and drop down the stream many miles. It will save much tramping, and deceive the enemy in the bargain."

Nothing more was said just then, for the word being passed along the line they all started off. Once more they passed down the hill with the evil reputation, and making a little detour reached the flowing river. This, like most African streams, was deep and sluggish, though possibly in places there might be rapids.

Bingo bade them wait for him, and taking two men with him stole away. He was going to secure the commodious native boats made of buffalo bull skins, and in each of which half a dozen men could find comfortable sitting.

Still poor Jack dared not give voice to his feelings. They were too close to the village, and an incautious cry was apt to bring some new peril down upon their heads. Oscar, knowing full well the agony of mind which had come to his chum, managed to find and squeeze Jack's hand as he whispered encouraging words in his ear:

“Wait a bit longer. Good news will keep, and I believe you’re going to give your mother the one great surprise of her whole life. Steady, now, Jack! Brace up!”

It was mighty hard, though, for the boy to contain himself, feeling positive as he did that he was close to his beloved father, who never dreamed of the vast surprise in store for him when he learned of the identity of his rescuers.

The boys were taking advantage of this delay to partly don some of their customary clothing, despite the fact that their skins were still covered with the pigment Bingo had used so as to make them resemble natives. At least they would feel much more comfortable thus garbed, and the shivering might cease, which would be one point gained.

Of course Ballyhoo fretted. He thought Bingo and the other two were gone an unreasonably long time. Still, since they heard nothing in the shape of an alarm break forth, with the tomtoms wildly beating, and five hundred savage voices joining in, they could continue to believe that the escape was as yet undiscovered.

Ah! that must be the dip of a paddle close by! Yes, now Ballyhoo could discover a shadowy *something* like a floating log that was coming down close to the bank of the river. Then he made out a bending figure that moved back and forth, while the gentle drip of drops of water falling back into the stream announced that it was indeed

a paddle that was being deftly wielded by hands accustomed to the service.

A second and a third floating object followed. Of course these must be the three who had gone forth bent upon detaching the needed craft from the flotilla belonging to the village. Possibly the boats may have been guarded, so that unusual care was necessary in order to detach the requisite number without causing trouble.

It was all right now, and the loading followed. Jack made sure to get into the boat which carried the escaping prisoner. More than that, he sat just behind the man, while Oscar occupied the space in front of the other.

They soon started down the river, two men in each skin boat using the paddles. With the aid of the current, and those paddles to urge them on, it should be easily possible for them to make as much as five miles an hour at the least.

Bingo sat in the leading canoe, being the one occupied by Jack, Oscar and the late prisoner, as well as Ballyhoo, who did not mean to be cheated out of anything if he could help it. When they had covered something like ten miles Bingo meant that they should carefully land, and then send the boats adrift. If they used due caution, and stepped only on logs and rocks, it was believed that even the crafty hunters of Lonabolo might never find their trail, and would therefore fail to know where to look for them, going much further down the river in a vain search.

Jack was waiting for the word from Oscar,

though he began to feel that it would be cruel to keep him much longer in such dreadful suspense. It was almost half an hour after they had started on the river voyage before Oscar would consent to any conversation. Then, believing that it would be safe to do so, he twisted himself around in order to face the man squatted on the bottom of the broad boat behind him, and went on to say:

"We learned of your being there, sir, through one of our black gun-bearers, and made up our minds to look into the matter. I can assure you that the indications seem to point to our all getting away in safety."

"Then you are hunters of big game, I take it?" asked the late prisoner.

"You are wrong in your surmise, sir," Oscar told him, with a reason in what he said, "for we have come here into the heart of Africa for another purpose. In fact, we hunt with the camera, being bent on securing moving picture films of wild life in the jungle!"

The man uttered a quick exclamation, hearing which Jack half arose to a kneeling position, and began to extend his anxious arms.

"Why, how strange that it should be those of my own kind, after all, who would come to my rescue!" the man exclaimed; "for I too was drawn to this country on just such an errand, now, alas! three long years ago. My poor family must long ago have believed me dead."

"Are you Mr. Anderson, sir?" demanded Os-

car, abruptly, for he saw Jack could be denied no longer.

“Yes, yes, but how could you know that?” demanded the other, astonished.

“Well, here is *one* member of your family who does not believe you dead, sir!” said Oscar, as he saw his chum throw his arms about the neck of the late prisoner.

CHAPTER XX

A JOYOUS REUNION—CONCLUSION

“FATHER, don’t you know me?” cried Jack, as he almost upset the boat in throwing himself upon the astounded man whom they had taken from Lonabolo’s kraal.

Of course the wonderful truth flashed upon Mr. Anderson then, though it must have been indeed difficult for him to grasp its immensity. They hugged each other as though only by this personal contact could they believe that it was all really true. But after a little both became more calm, and in low voices explanations were made.

When he found that after all this great feat had been engineered and carried to a successful end by his own son and two loyal chums, the latter of whom he greeted most warmly, Mr. Anderson was lost in admiration for their daring.

“Why,” he told them, “you have done what no living white man has ever ventured to undertake, in braving the enmity of Lonabolo, who hates our race bitterly for some reason explained to me, and which you shall hear about at some other time.”

“It might be better,” advised Oscar, remember-

ing that they were not yet out of the danger zone, "if we left all the rest until a later occasion. Some warrior might be abroad on the river or ashore, and hearing English spoken guess something of the truth. We can make up for it when we feel safer."

So they relapsed into silence, save for the "swish" of the boats through the water, and the drip, drip of the paddles so deftly handled by the stout blacks. Jack sat holding his father's hand, and every now and then squeezing it, as if to reassure himself that it was a reality and no dream.

Then came the time when Bingo told them they might go ashore, since the river in one of its capricious curves had come within a few miles of the place where the balance of the expedition had been left.

Floating down close to the bank, he finally found just such a favorable landing-place as he wanted, where there were numerous logs lying about, and a rocky point in addition.

Every possible care was taken not to leave any trace of their having quitted the river at this point. Rocks and logs were made use of in order to leave no trail behind them. Long before any hostile eye could be searching the shore for signs the wet spots on the rocks and logs would have dried in the breeze that was blowing; and by that time too the fugitives hoped to be many miles distant, urging the burden-bearing blacks to redoubled efforts in order to escape from the savage Lonabolo's domains.

All went well. The canoes were sent adrift, and if ever recovered by their late owners it must be many miles further down-stream. Even then the boats would afford no possible clue concerning the disappearance of those who had been concerned in the astounding escape of the man with the "little god in a box."

Mr. Anderson had of course been compelled to leave his old camera behind him, a fact he would always deeply regret, not so much on account of its value, but from associations connected with it as a life saver. He later on told the boys how its possession had caused him to be looked upon as a favored being, and accounted for his being granted many liberties of action by the black king.

In due time they came upon the camp of the safari. The headman was more than delighted to see them, and to also learn how they had succeeded in releasing the captive of the big kraal. They did not linger longer than was necessary to cook a meal, which being dispatched they at once started forth with all speed.

Mr. Anderson for the first time in three years tasted some of the luxuries that must have frequently been in his mind, for he sipped his coffee with many exclamations of delight. The fare upon which the blacks of equatorial Africa subsist may suffice to keep body and soul together, he admitted, but he missed many things to which he had become accustomed all his life.

All through that day they pushed on along the back trail. Surprising progress was made too,

for it seemed that all the porters had such fear of Lonabolo deep down in their hearts that with the enmity of the king now fully aroused they did not mean to take any more chances than were absolutely necessary.

So the days passed, and all went well. They never saw anything of the war-like Monumwezi again. If the black warriors spread out through the forest seeking those who had visited their village in the dead of night, to spirit the white prisoner away, they must have followed the wrong clue, which pleased Oscar and his chums first-rate.

And one fine day the safari again came in sight of the ocean, as they approached the very coast town from which many weeks before the start of the expedition had been made.

The glorious prospect gave them keen satisfaction. How Mr. Anderson feasted his eyes on that vast expanse of salt water, after his long incarceration in the fever-infested interior of the Dark Continent, away from his kindred, and with only ignorant blacks for company.

Somewhere far across that heaving ocean a dear little woman was waiting, praying each day that her beloved boy might be spared to return safely to her side, and it might be with definite news regarding the one who had so long been missing.

If Jack and his father could have wings they would have flown with the speed of the light to far-away America, there to drop in at that cottage in Melancton and bring greatest joy to a fond

heart. As it was, the best that Jack could do was to send a telegraphic message that, on being relayed, would be carried by cable to the American station.

It had been decided as wisest not to mention the great surprise that awaited the mother and wife. And so all Jack sent, with his name signed, were the words:

"All well. Returning home. Trip a great success!"

That would keep her heart filled with relief until they arrived, when the wonderful news could be broken to her gently, though they say that joy never kills.

Here at the coast town the boys settled with all their faithful attendants. The headman was loud in his appreciation of their liberality; and poor Bingo looked very disconsolate at having to say good-bye to the three "young bwanas" whom he had come to appreciate so highly.

Jack took a last picture of them all before going aboard the lighter that was to ferry them out to the steamship in the offing. He was happy in having succeeded in taking so many thrilling pictures, and never wearied of talking about them with his deeply interested father.

Mr. Anderson, having managed to get to a barber after reaching the coast, began to look more like his old self, after having had his hair and beard trimmed. He had little to remind him of those interesting three years spent in the native village, save his vivid memories. Still, if the film

which Ballyhoo had worked came out decently, they could always have a vision of not only the stockade and the great kraal beyond, but also of the marching army of black warriors, the wonderful Lion Dance, and other things besides.

There is little more to tell before we write the closing words. They reached London safely, where another cable message went to those across the sea, promising that when ten days more had elapsed they hoped to be home again, and that all was still well.

Then one day the train stopped at Melancton, and three boys sprang down and rushed into arms that were waiting for their arrival. Jack managed to hold his mother tight as he tried to tell her to be strong, for there was wonderful news coming.

She must have sensed the truth, for she gave a cry, and in another instant was sobbing hysterically in the arms of her husband, whom she had never expected to see again in this world.

Jack and Oscar went to the city shortly afterwards, and saw to the development of the precious films themselves, for they had made it a part of their contract that they were to possess one of the first set of reels ready for the market.

They turned out wonderfully well, and congratulations were freely showered on the intrepid young adventurers by those connected with the big motion picture combine with whom they had made their deal. Others might have secured striking scenes of wild animal life in Africa, but cer-

tainly none to compare with those brought out by Jack Anderson and his chums, every one of which appeared to be a gem with regard to spirited action, and a faithful record of what life in the jungle and forests is like.

The day those amazing films were showed in Melancton found the whole town seething with excitement. In fact, such were the crowds that flocked to the "movie" theatre that the management had to keep them going afternoon and evening for a whole week.

Thousands of delighted admirers went again and again to watch those thrilling reels of strange life in the heart of far-distant Africa, and also to examine the elephant tusks, the horn of a rhinoceros, and all the other remarkable mementoes of that wonderful trip which Jack and his chums had brought back with them.

And, doubtless, the most interested spectators of all were Jack's father and mother, as again and again they sat there feasting their eyes on the scenes of barbaric and wild animal life which must forever haunt the dreams of the late prisoner of Lonabolo's kraal.

It can be readily understood that their great good fortune in the two ventures upon which they had so far engaged was likely to inspire our three chums with a yearning for other fields of endeavor, difficult feats which they believed they might figure in successfully. That some such ambition influenced them in their future actions may be set down as certain, especially after you have

learned that the next volume in this series, in which you are promised that you are to meet Oscar, Jack and also Ballyhoo Jones, will be entitled: "The Motion Picture Comrades Aboard a Submarine, or Searching for Treasure Under the Sea."

THE END

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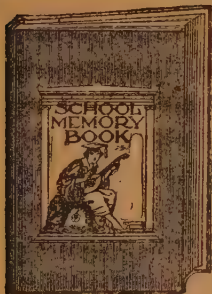
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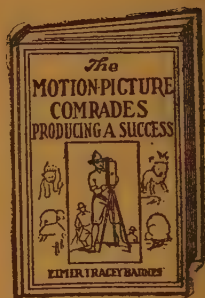
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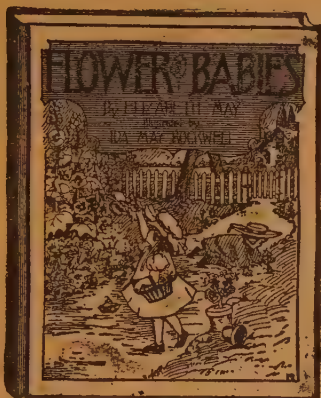
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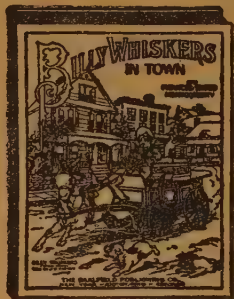
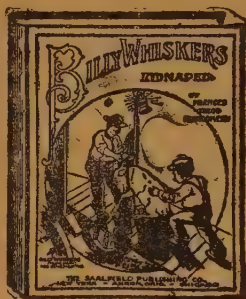
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